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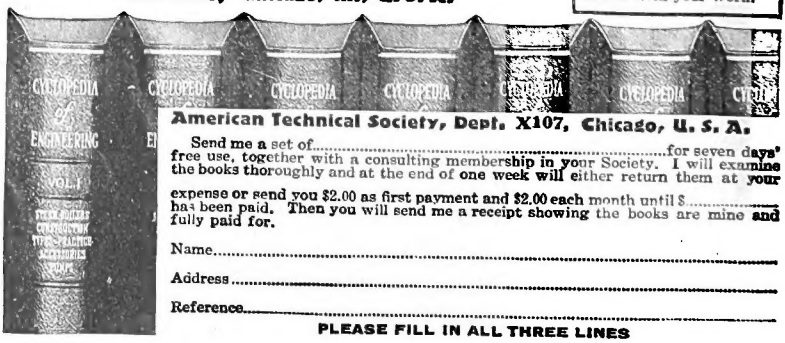

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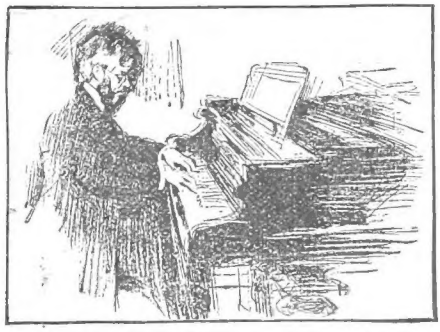

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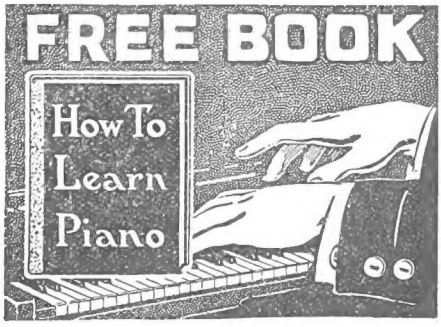

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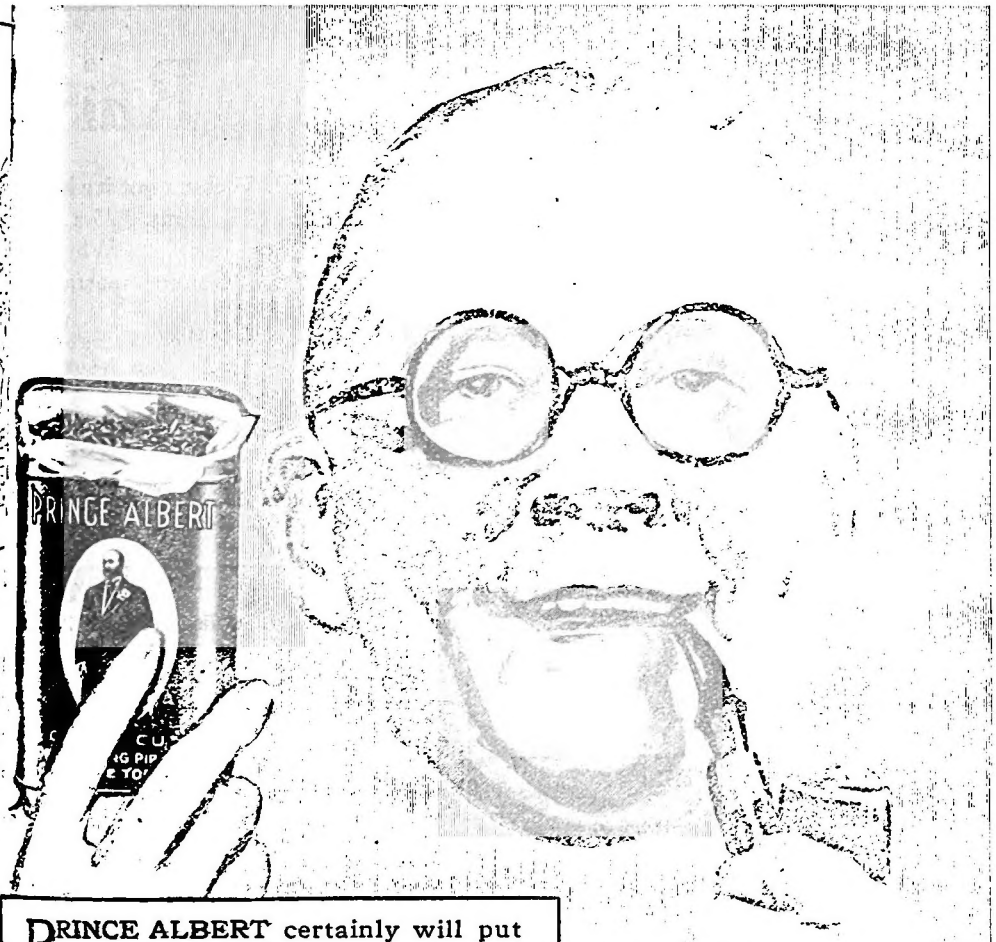

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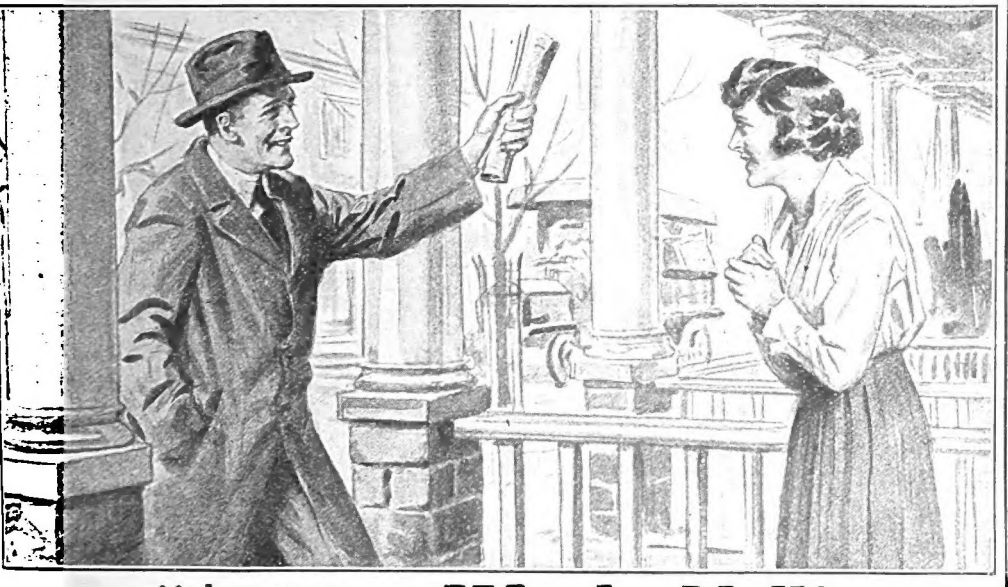

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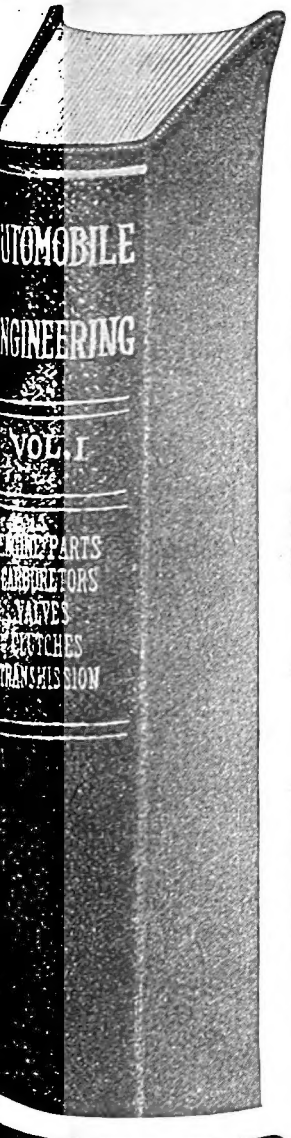

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IN THE wilderness they wielded a power like that of empires. They were great and strong, those old fur companies of the North. When rival posts contended for the prizes of the same territory, competition was keen and exciting. When the rival post managers were such as Hugh Pendexter tells about in "Gentlemen of the North," it makes an absorbing story. Four parts, and the first is in our next issue.

"*DYNAMITE*"—mule-skinner! Well, he had his peculiar talents—and they were in demand. He could pluck out a native's eye with a drover's whip; could kill a man with his heavy fist. The C. O. selected him for the journey—the journey through the wilds of Mindanao—which almost ended disastrously for both himself and the girl. Read C. M. Cosby's complete novelette in our next number.

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BARABBAS ISLAND

A COMPLETE NOVEL

An UP-AND-DOWN THE-EARTH tale

by Talbot Mundy

Author of "On the Trail of Tippoo Tib," "The Shriek of Dûm," etc.

THIS is the eighth of a series of tales, each a complete story in itself, in which an American and three English friends endeavor to gain by any honest means a large sum of money particularly needed by one of them, "*Monty*" (*Lord Montdidier*). In previous numbers they have sought and found gold and ivory in the jungles of Africa, after many adventures. This story finds them in Alexandria—in their ears rumors of hidden treasure.

"BILL'S," at Alexandria, is one of those strange places dotted here and there about the world so well known to some men that mention of them brings surging reminiscence, and utterly unknown to everybody else.

The very name of the place makes, for instance, certain brands of missionary blink, including even those who have been inside. On the other hand, there is a bishop—whom half the world agrees to honor—who always spends an hour or two up-stairs at Bill's on the occasions when he visits Alexandria.

But he, in addition to being a friend of man, plays chess. In spite of the lurid lies ignorant untraveled and malignant traveled tell, in spite of appearances and some history, chess made Bill's famous. It was chess that brought Monty there—in the rather dim front room above the noisy bar.

A strange setting undoubtedly for a privy councilor of England, Earl of Montdidier and Kirkudbrightshire, ex-colonel of cavalry. But chess levels ranks and respects no persons. Monty sat with waxed mustache-ends pricked to a qui vive and his long legs stretched apart, face to face with a Chinese mandarin—in exile but receiving ample funds from mysterious sources—who played a subtle game, yielding as it were before the wind of Monty's swift attacks, gentle, smiling, losing a game very seldom.

Superficially at least, the atmosphere of Bill's suited Fred Oakes vastly better.

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He sprawled in the opposite far corner, suggestive of the roistering swordsmen of a bygone age with his neat beard, frankly awake eyes and attitude of hips and shoulders that only campaigning gives a man. He made music troubadour fashion on his concertina to a motley gathering of men of many nations—for you can do what you like and when you like at Bill's, whatever the chess-players have to say about it.

Every once in a while Monty glanced across and damned him for being noisy. Then the mandarin sought with a deprecating smile to preserve the peace, not understanding that English friendship is in danger only when the friends grow too polite. At each remonstrance Fred laughed.

"Thank your stars I take my pleasures soberly!" he shouted in reply to one of Monty's fierce rebukes. "I've known friends of yours, Didums, carried to bed in the middle of convivial afternoons. Thank the Lord I am not as other men are—or even as this Egyptologist!"

He touched with his toe the recumbent form of a man better known as authority on Gizeh than as a drinker, yet a drinker of strange, strong drinks for all that.

There was remarkably little drunkenness up-stairs at Bill's, although the bar below is the usual longshore lush-house with the stains all gilded over and the mirrors screened from flies. Anybody down-stairs could get drunk as deeply and often as he pleased and take his chance with the police.

But up-stairs only the favored few forget themselves, and they are protected; it is thoroughly understood that any police officer who treads the shabby, narrow strip of carpet leading to the rooms above does so with official eyes shut.

So, although Prof. Grogan Guthrie's head lay on a footstool close by the heels of Samson—and a blind man could have recognized him for a policeman by the air with which he tried to seem soldierly and civil at the same time—there was no risk of any consequences but a headache, and that was certainty; rum mixed with vanderhum would make a tile roof throb.

After a while Will Yerkes came in, looking blithe and unscarred by circumstance, and very handsome except for his protruding ears. It is strange that a bishop should look in place in Bill's upper room, and a Yankee gentleman adventurer like some strayed angel. But so it was. Will had already killed his man in fair fight more than a dozen times; yet the bishop, whose flies, and even fleas, were killed for him, would have been shocked to see him there, without troubling much on Prof. Grogan Guthrie's score. There are a number of things in this world that it takes fools to explain.

Will came over and sat by me and we both watched Monty's game during several moves, until the mandarin castled his king and Monty made a cavalry swoop with his queen's bishop, taking a pawn.

"Check!" said Monty sternly.

"The Chink has him in three all the same!" Will whispered.

"Excuse me, in two!" smiled the mandarin, overhearing what was not intended for him, as is the way of some quiet men.

Monty frowned over the board and began twisting one end of his mustache.

"Cut it, Monty!" Will advised him.

"Cut what? The game?"

"No, the mustache. Pulling it out by the roots is going to hurt too much."

Monty retired his bishop. His opponent moved a knight.

"Checkmate, I believe," said the mandarin politely.

"Thanks," said Monty. "Very good game."

"No," smiled the mandarin. "Very feeble game. You were thinking all the time of whether professors of Egyptology need more time than other men in which to grow sober. Impatience is not a proper frame of mind in which to approach the chess-board."

"Join my friends and me in a drink," Monty invited him.

"And become as the Egyptologist?" He smiled with the peculiar inscrutable humor that is the birthright of his race. One could not guess whether he approved or disapproved of drunkenness. "We Chinese have different failings. I will eat with you."

MONTY struck a table bell.

"Sandwiches!" he ordered the dark-skinned nondescript who appeared out of a corner like the jinnee of Aladdin's lamp. "What racial failing do you admit?" he asked the Chinaman.

"We are garrulous."

We all expressed surprize.

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"You've a national reputation for keeping secrets," said Monty.

"In my country," said Will, "we've a police custom known as the third degree. It's highly civilized—guaranteed efficient or your money back. Nobody believes a Chinaman has feelings, so his feelings aren't spared. Yet nobody ever found out the facts about a Tong war yet!"

The mandarin smiled.

"Perhaps there are no facts," he suggested. "We are garrulous. I myself am very garrulous. It was I who told Prof. Grogan Guthrie the story that has made you gentlemen so anxious to see him sober."

"Excuse me. How did you come to hear it yourself?" Monty asked him, and the Chinaman smiled again, as some folk smile at children who ask questions.

I realized for the first time why, as a boy I always loathed my teachers. It was not superior wisdom—one could respect that. Nor was it low cunning—this mandarin was a gentleman, as very many teachers are. It was pride in the great gulf fixed between him and us; and, whereas I did not loathe him, I lost all desire to know him better. I suppose I showed it. Monty, schooled in diplomacy and strategy and tactics, was urbane.

"Pass me your watch," said the mandarin, looking at me.

Mine happens to be an heirloom—one of those examples of marvelous workmanship on which our grandfathers liked to lavish money. I unhooked it from the chain and passed it to him, not without pride of ownership.

"You observe?" His voice was as unemotional as when he explained a deep move to his opponent after a game of chess. "He passes me his priceless thing. Yet he would not give me his confidence even should we sit and talk forever. I would not lend my watch to him, although it is an inexpensive one. Am I to tell him what is in my mind?"

"You must do as you like," said Monty. "He is a friend of mine, I vouch for him."

"In China," said the mandarin, passing my watch back, "we once had an emperor who was invited to vouch for the good faith of his son. What do you suppose he answered? 'When I can prove the good faith of you who ask and am satisfied with the purity of my own purpose in answering, then it will be time to speak about my son.' I respect your loyalty to your friend but am unconvinced by it, having lived to witness disappointment. I am garrulous. Why should I trust another not to talk?"

"You may speak out," I said. "I will repeat nothing without your permission."

"Is your friend an English gentleman?" he asked, and Monty nodded.

"Then the only risks I should run in making him confidences would be that he should become drunk, or be enamored of a woman, or confess to a priest, or turn sentimental on his death-bed. The English consider the approach of death releases from obligation to keep secrets!"

"Not at all," said Monty.

"If it were not so," the mandarin continued calmly, "few of your novels, almost none of your melodramas and some of your best plays could not have been written! The English make death-bed confessions. It is a national disease!"

"You shouldn't take the playwrights seriously," Monty answered, getting a little hot behind the ears I thought.

"But I do! They know! It was death-bed confession by an Englishman that put me in possession of the secret, which you are so eager to know that you offer to vouch for a friend, over whose tongue you have no control whatever!"

"The point is this," said Monty, casting diplomacy to the winds and falling back on the British army's everlasting strategy—"brute force and —— ignorance." "There are four of us—Mr. Oakes over there, Mr. Yerkes, this gentleman and myself. It's a case of all or none of us. Prof. Guthrie invited me to help finance and to take part in an expedition. Then he, ah——"

"Fell off the wagon," suggested Will.

"Excuse me," said the mandarin. "There was no wagon. He is not injured bodily. It is a case of——"

"Under the weather," said I.

"No, no," said the mandarin. "Drunk. He is drunk."

"That's what I meant," I said. "There is one Englishman for you who doesn't tell when drunk. We couldn't get a word out of him."

"That is because he is Scotch," said the mandarin. "He tells when he is sober. He had no permission from me."

"Perhaps you would rather we withdrew?" suggested Monty, who is also, of

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course, Scotch in every fiber of his being, unless you go back so many hundred years that you prove him Norman.

"It is I who should withdraw, seeing it is my secret," said the mandarin. "Yet it was told me by a man so foolish as to imagine death made it of no further value to himself. We Chinese, you know, extract exquisite humor from the practise of taking secrets with us beyond the grave, whence no amount of ingenuity can bring back anything but vain desire. Seeing that you have met me mind to mind over the chess-board, I will take you into confidence, accepting promises."

"Good of you, I'm sure," said Monty.

"Promises conditional on human failings! If that gentleman gets drunk, or grows enamored of a woman, or is sentimental on his death-bed, my secret shall be spread to the four winds! I recognize and accept that risk!"

I ROSE to my feet. One does not need almond eyes in order to feel racial prejudice. I had heard about enough of his candor.

"Sit down, please!" he begged me, instantly cordial.

I would have walked away, but Monty made me a signal with his eyebrows. The mandarin's next question staggered all three of us.

"Do you ever read the Bible?"

"I think I've read most of it," Monty admitted, "or heard it read at one time or another."

"They made me read parts of it at school," said I.

"My mother drilled it into me," admitted Will, smiling far away, as if he saw New England in the distance.

"Some day," said the mandarin, "we Chinese will send missionaries to England and America. The English and Americans send Bibles to the East but never read the book themselves. We enjoy it. Some day we will come and teach you to enjoy it. Do you remember who Barabbas was?"

Monty nodded.

"When I was at Oxford, there was a dean who couldn't say his Rs. I made a point of attending chapel when he read the lesson. 'Now Bawabbas was a wobber!' Yes. Go on."

"Did you know there is an island named after Barabbas?"

"No."

"It lies in the Red Sea. It is so small and thought to be so worthless and so far away from the ordinary track of ships that it appears only on the most carefully compiled British charts. On those it is called by another name. But the real name is Barabbas Island."

"How do you know that?" demanded Monty.

"Have I not said that an English gentleman made to me a death-bed confession? Does one English gentleman doubt the word of another?"

"I'm an American myself," said Will, "better able to doubt a Chink's word than maybe you'd believe!"

The mandarin blinked.

"Has the island's real name been confirmed from any other source?" asked Monty.

"The Turks own it," said the mandarin. "In the course of my studies of all nations I have found that the Turks when they conquered nearly always changed the names of places—but not quite always. There are rare exceptions. This is one of them. If you watch at this port or at Port Said or at Suez for a steamer flying the Turkish flag and ask to see the captain's charts, you will find, if you can read the Turkish characters, that the island is there marked Barabbas. Let us be thankful because Turks left something as they found it. Very well!"

"I know where I can see a Turkish chart," said Monty. "Go ahead. Tell the story, and we'll listen."

The mandarin coughed. It would be exaggeration to say he smiled, but he conveyed the impression of being secretly amused.

"I have said I am studying all nations," he began. "Nations—even the Swiss are of more than one class. Therefore, besides conversing with many members of the English House of Lords, I have visited the jails—finding incidentally a lord or two confined in them. I study high and low—the Prussian military caste, which is immensely amusing, the French peasant, the priest, the merchant, the fisherman, the law-maker, who saddens me. So, when I found an English gentleman suffering severely from an unknown disease in Shepheard's Hotel at Cairo, I studied him too."

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"How did you get introduced to him?" I asked, not without intentional edge to my voice.

"His fellow countrymen at the hotel were all afraid of the disease," he answered. "He was glad to see me. Oh yes, there was a doctor. He signed the death certificate and called it 'general debility' on account of the hotel's reputation. Selection of that name for the disease precluded an autopsy. He was extremely inquisitive to see the man's inside. Oh yes, and there was a nurse also—a volunteer—a lady of title; but she was a most homely lady, with pronounced views on religion and most other things, and the sick man was extremely pleased to talk to me."

"Did you learn his name?" asked Monty.

"Dent—Charles Dent—the son of a well-to-do London merchant. He told me about himself. His father sent him to a university—Oxford—Cambridge—I forget which—intending him for one of what you so humorously call the learned professions. But nothing interested him except travel—and history as it is not written in the text-books. So he and his father quarreled."

"Cut him off?" I asked, with a twinge of fellow feeling.

"No. He had money. But he left home. His father desired him to become famous, but his treatises on the politics of ancient Judea were read by nobody except a critic or two, who denounced him for a humbug. They even became out of print, his publisher not caring for the stigma of being connected with such hare-brained stuff. So from nosing among old manuscripts Charles Dent came abroad to investigate old places. One trail led to another. He made friends with the Turkish officials. He was shown ancient court records recovered from ruins that may have been those of Herod's palace. A Turk refused money for them. Think of that! One of them related to the trial of the man Barabbas, who seems to have been a much greater robber than he is given credit for."

"What became of the manuscripts?" demanded Monty.

We were all on the *qui vive* now, race prejudice forgotten. Not that Monty had once forgotten manners.

"The Turk sent them by Turkish mail to his father in Constantinople, hoping to secure a fortune, and they went down with the ship in a storm."

We swore with unanimity and vehemence that made the mandarin jump. He thought for a moment that we were going to accuse him of making away with priceless historic records.

"Go on!" said Monty, grimly.

"IT SEEMS Barabbas was a corsair—an adventurer—a pirate on a great scale, who owned an island. On land his men looted the caravans, waylaying them as they passed between Jerusalem and Egypt. At sea they plundered the coasts of Upper Egypt. They always escaped to the island when hard pressed, but they were not pressed hard very often, because Barabbas understood how to bribe to advantage. Finally he seems to have tried too rashly to exercise influence on politics, and Herod's men captured him.

"But the Romans did not allow him to be executed. They wanted to 'squeeze' him first, as I think the civilized nations describe the process. These court papers that have so unhappily been lost through a Turk's too great cupidi y took the form, I believe, of letters from Herod to the Romans and from the Romans to Herod, regarding the probable amount of the hoarded plunder, the prospects of securing all or part of it, the division of it and the means to be employed."

"Well?"

We all spoke at once. The pause was intolerable.

"That is all."

"All?"

We eyed one another as the dogs do when they think a bone has been stolen, each looking for a hint of the solution in the other's eyes.

"The Turk had no other papers. There was no record of what happened to Barabbas. There was no account of the division of the spoil."

"There wouldn't be," said Will. "Politicians leave no traces when they divvy up the swag."

"Charles Dent reasoned," said the mandarin, "that since Barabbas is known to have been released from prison by the Romans, perhaps there was no division of the booty. Perhaps the island was never visited by Herod's men or Roman guards. He decided to go to the island."

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"Well?"

"He did. He was afraid to go alone. The island is inhabited by very fierce savages, descendants of the original followers of Barabbas. So he took a certain professor into confidence—a German, by name Schindler, and they went together and lived on the island. They found many traces but no treasure."

"What happened to Schindler?"

"That is a question. Perhaps he is on the island now. Charles Dent was quite convinced treasure will be found, and the German no less. But Dent fell ill and the German inoculated him with some preparation that he said would render him immune from tropical disease. He became more ill, was obliged to come away. Finally he fell to pieces—literally."

"Well?"

"That is all. I told the story to Prof. Grogan Guthrie. It affected him. Look! See! Behold!"

"Are you going to the island?" I asked.

"My young Christian friend," said the mandarin, "I could no more be persuaded to go there than you could now be prevented—you and your friends. I recognize symptoms. I wish you better fortune on the journey than I think is likely to befall you. Charles Dent told me it is a devil of an island."

II

BILL'S never shuts its doors, and nobody except the man too drunk to come away sleeps there. The mandarin departed smiling to unknown quarters in a part of town the English rarely visit. Other, noisier guests went out; less sober ones came in, and other deadly sober men with hungry eyes intent on midnight chess.

We laid Professor Guthrie on cushions under a table where he would be quite safe, put a note in his pocket telling him where to find us when he should come to himself, collected Fred Oakes—who objected, because he was listening to tales about the Frijiloffs from two ex-sealing captains—and tramped back to our hotel by the longest route, along the sea front, to get real air into our lungs.

"They assure me," said Fred, "that, when the seals come back in Spring to breed——"

"Shut up!" growled Monty.

"To —— with seals!" said Will.

"But what on earth could any man ask for better," objected Fred, "than to steam out to lonely islands and explore?"

Three hours later, when we had thrashed out the problem of Barabbas Island, sitting in Monty's armchair and on Monty's bed, confusing each other with absurd arguments and viewing the thing from every angle except the unimaginable one of letting the whole thing drop, Fred yawned and reversed himself.

"Islands are no good!" he asserted. "Better try the mainland. D'you mean to tell me that you——"

"Ginks," suggested Will.

"That you Homeless Katies honestly intend to go down that bleeding Red Sea again? We four again alone? Offer to take Guthrie with us? All right. I make one stipulation."

"Name it and let us get to sleep," said Monty.

"If we catch Barabbas, that we cage him and put him on view in Bond Street at half a guinea admission! Hang it, I've got to have some hope to draw me forward! Now go to sleep. I'll round up Guthrie and pour black coffee into him. Will, please put the Castile soap in Monty's mouth if he snores. Night-night, everybody!"

An hour after dawn he was back again, all sluiced and spruced, with Grogan Guthrie in tow, and the professor did not look much the worse for his night's debauch—not much worse—nor very self-conscious. The things one does in Bill's are cast in no man's teeth. His hand trembled a little. He was a shade too cordial. But he could not guess from our manner that his own was not perfect.

"Lord Mundidger, I'm deelighted. Yes, deelighted. Yes, your friend Mr. Oakes has told me everything. I'm willing to go with you. In fact, I'm eager to go with you. In fact, I couldn't consent to be left behind! My period, you know! My pet study! Jerusalem—the Red Sea—Israelites—Great Pyramid—fascinating! This story of Barabbas makes me simply wild—wild, I assure you! I suppose you'll let me tag along?"

The evening before, until unconsciousness crept over him like night over the day, it had been he who was persuading us to

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go with him. His eyes darkened while I watched him as disturbing memory danced out of reach.

"Rum mixed with vanderhum works wonders," Fred whispered. "Just now a cocktail's raising counter-revolution."

"I don't like this guy!" remarked Will in the sort of stage whisper that carries farther and produces more conviction than a shout.

Monty frowned.

"Have you any plans or information beyond what we learned from Hi Ying Lang?" he asked.

"Hi Ying is a rascal!" snapped Guthrie, dropping his ingratiating manner like a glove. Elusive memory was pinned at last. "He had no business to tell you anything. He promised to keep the whole thing secret! I remember now! Oh, yes, I remember now! Hi Ying was to have financed me—I've spent my available funds, you know, taking measurements of Gizeh. Hi Ying was to have lent me a thousand pounds, to be repaid out of the proceeds, if any, of the expedition. He had no right to tell you people a word!"

The change from solicitude to mean resentment was so swift that we had no answer ready. It was Fred, proud of reconstruction work, who took up cudgels for him and made further negotiations possible.

"He feels," he said, "as we might if Hi Ying had sold us."

"That is so," said Guthrie. "I feel indignant."

"It was you who first told me of the thing," said Monty bluntly. "We propose to go and see. We can finance a trip, and we're willing to take you with us. You may have any literary credit accruing from it. You may give the story to the world afterward, if you see fit, without competition."

"Will you put that in writing—in writing?" snapped Grogan Guthrie, pacing up and down the floor with bright eyes and snapping fingers.

Monty laughed.

"Put your own terms on paper and let me see them," he said.

Guthrie sat down by the window and wrote eagerly, as if he had already considered every point. Will took my elbow.

"Are you going to wait to see Monty turn him down or will you come with me?" he asked.

"Come where?"

"To send a telegram."

The walk to the telegraph office was a scant three hundred yards along a drab street. I was not interested. Will Yerkes departed alone, whistling "There'll be a hot time——"

Grogan Guthrie, with a gleam in his eye that would have done credit to a professional duelist, got up from the rickety writing-desk and offered a half-sheet of paper to Monty.

"Roughly, those are my terms," he said. "I should employ a lawyer, of course, to draw the real contract."

Monty read, laughed and passed the paper back without a word of comment.

"You said you would sign!" snapped Guthrie.

"You're mistaken, professor. If you are looking for some one to finance you, guard you on your journey, guide you, work for you, obey you, give you all the credit—and the profit—and say nothing to any one about it forever afterwards without your leave, you'd better try elsewhere."

"Step off the earth and try the next world!" Fred suggested.

"You will not sign that?" said Guthrie. "Then I serve you notice, Lord Mundidger, that I shall make other arrangements."

"You're welcome," said Monty cheerfully.

"And that the secret of that island is rightly mine!"

"Not, for instance, Hi Ying's?" suggested Monty.

"Not at all! The rascal gave it to me! If you should dare try to forestall my expedition to that island, I shall denounce you publicly as a dishonorable adventurer, Lord Mundidger!"

"Very well," said Monty, lighting a cigaret.

"Out you get! Out into the sun with you!" said Fred. "I held the brute's head in these two hands while he catted out the vanderhum. One hand should have held a strainer. I might have caught the modesty and spread it out to dry! Good-by forever, Grogan Guthrie! No, don't stammer. Nobody will tell tales out of school! We shall deny all knowledge of you! You're thumbs downed! Don't give me excuse for picking a new bone with you, that's all!"

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Guthrie went out with a fine rage boiling in his vitals and conviction of the justice of his own case stiffening his back.

"IF HE is determined," said Monty, "he has friends who believe in him. He can get money."

"This time tomorrow," I said, "he'll repent and go back to his pyramid."

"I'd find it hard to rejoice about him even if he did," said Monty.

"Repent!" said Fred. "He's the same man who claimed sole right to explore Egypt for traces of the Exodus. I've heard Lord Cromer offered to file his application for a monopoly of hell! We'll hear from him again."

"Poor fellow!" said Monty.

"Good riddance!" said I. "I'll bet we've seen the last of him!"

Then in came Will Yerkes, cheerier than ever, smoking a fearful thing he calls a stogie that he buys by the thousand even in Egypt, where they make real cigarets.

"Asked for the earth, didn't he? I've met up with his brand! Did he go or was he pushed? Went? What's come over you fellers? We leave for Port Said at noon. Not more than time to pack. You'd better get a move on!"

"Isn't this sudden?" asked Monty.

"You bet it is! So's the Vandam sudden! Met her yesterday while Monty played chess with the Chink. Hadn't seen her since I sat on one seat in school with her. She and her aunt. The old man's dead. I'm told the estate paid taxes on eighty million. Gracie's the only child. Doing the world on a yacht like a young Cunarder and bored already plum through to the middle—says she's tried every way to get in trouble and simply can't; nothing goes wrong. They wouldn't even arrest her for flirting with young British officers at Gib! Says she could have learned all their naval secrets in a week but they didn't have any! Gracie is some live wire. The yacht's at Port Said, coaling. She joined it this morning. I've wired her we're coming with a red-hot plan for real adventure, and she's to wait for us. Hurry, you fellers, hurry!"

The old Greeks knew what they were doing when they made a god jump out of a trap and adjust things at critical moments in the play. They were dealing in truth—life as it really is. We were only one more instance of a pack of ingrates looking fortune's gift horse in the mouth. We actually dared to doubt. It was minutes before Fred seized all the things on Monty's dressing-table and threw them on the bed in rank confusion.

"Pack, Didums!" he shouted and ran to his own room, where we heard him hurl a trunk against the wall.

Doubt was still uppermost in my mind. Something else, probably experience, cautioning against adventures with young women, dulled the edge of Monty's enthusiasm. But the unwritten code compelled. Will Yerkes was one of us. At our call—Monty's or Fred's or mine—he had chanced his arm already a hundred times. Unbelieving, he had flung himself into ventures of ours for simple friendship's sake, arguing always, ridiculing almost always, but unswervingly with us to the end. We had neither right nor will to back out from his arrangement now.

So high, hot noon saw us sweating under the roof of a first-class reserved compartment, while Fred—acting cashier for the day—accused the station baggage-clerk of nameless crimes on account of the size of our bill for excess luggage.

The heat in the end got the better of both of them. Fred paid and got in panting five minutes before the train started. The baggage-clerk withdrew into a shadowy corner with the stigma of seven separate and distinct insults unanswered.

"I forgot to mention his deceased wife's sister," Fred admitted self-accusingly. "But never mind—I damned his family in heaps. He'll never be able to look at one of them again without thinking of things I told him. Think of it! Fifteen pounds, sixteen and sixpence for toting four men's luggage from Alexandria to Port Said!"

"Was it fair to soak that poor devil for the administration's sins?" Will wondered.

"Of course not!" Fred retorted. "Did you ever know me jump seriously on the right man?"

"Out with it!" grinned Monty. "What's the meat under the crust?"

"I tipped the pig half-a-sovereign. He pouched it and then weighed even my walking stick! I'll get out and mention his deceased wife's sister!"

But the train wailed and screamed and started. Fred forgot all baggage-clerks

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while listening to Will's accounts of Grace Vandam. All the way to Port Said we speculated on what sort of offer to make the lady. Even Will was with us in determination to have a clear understanding with her before starting for anywhere on board her yacht.

"We're previous," I objected.

"Don't you believe it," said Will. "Gracie will jump at us."

And so she did, if not exactly as Will prophesied or she intended.

We left our heaps of luggage on the platform at Port Said for strategic reasons, meaning to be free to decline all offers and retreat with dignity should we desire. And we walked through the sandy streets because our legs were stiff from sitting in the torture-box they called a train.

We were followed, of course, by eleven beggars—three of them blind, two indescribably diseased and the rest too well to work; also by a donkey-boy, proclaiming loudly to the universe the virtues of his beasts by name and his unbelief in the virtue of white men who soiled their shoes.

Close to the main street another swarm of beggars joined us, so that we were a pretty fair-sized party as we turned at a right-angle and headed toward the quay, along a street that passed the prison. Opposite that we saw a lady dressed in creamy, expensive stuff, who stepped toward the bars to peer at the criminals inside.

"That's Gracie," said Will.

The six-foot six-inch coal-black sentry motioned her away. She argued with him. He talked back in a jargon resembling Arabic, not a word of which she understood, as he well knew. He said things that a polyglot Levantine dandy loafing near at hand understood perfectly, for he waved his cigar with a very jaunty air and came up close, leering and saying things in English with fat, unwholesome lips. She slapped his face.

IN A minute there was a crowd, arrived from nowhere like the fleshless motion-picture people but stinking in proof of reality. The brute hit her back and received a blow in the eye that staggered him. Gracie had not shared schooling with boys for nothing. There went up a roar like the loosing of riot. We began to charge down-street, blocked at every cross-street by the hurrying, yelling natives of the place. A policeman blew a vilely shrill whistle and Gracie screamed. We could not see her any longer.

I snatched a club from a policeman who was arguing with the crowd from the rear—a lovely thing, twice as long as a New York policeman's night-stick. Monty used his fists. Fred upset a money-changer's stand and seized the legs it stood on. Will went through the crowd in the style of an American line-plunging full-back—bucked it—the swiftest piece of rescue work I ever saw—and we crashed along behind him.

So the crowd opened up. The Levantine and two others let go of Grace Vandam. She saw Will and Monty and jumped—was between them—in their arms—in a twinkle, nothing the worse excepting a bruise where the Levantine landed with his knuckles on her cheek-bone.

"I said Gracie 'ud jump at us!" laughed Will.

Fred and I reached the fat Levantine simultaneously and his screams for the next three minutes would have convinced any one three blocks away that he was being flayed alive, which was not at all the case. The club did not break the skin much. And about six minutes after that we were all under arrest, on the way to the police station, with hot, uniformed United States Americans from the *Daisy*—the Vandam yacht—hurrying to the rescue from four directions. We had utmost difficulty in preventing them from renewing the fight.

Luckily the magistrate had seen the whole thing from the roof of the hotel. He came down to the police court, heard the case at once and discharged everybody.

"That ends it," he told us, "provided you all get out of Port Said before they can go over my head. Civil suits for damages for assault will be the next in order. Be advised!"

"The *Daisy* is coaled," said Miss Vandam.

"And the *Daisy's* officers and crew are unanimous against your staying ashore in this hole, miss," put in the yacht's second mate.

"You take some men and go and bring these gentlemen's baggage, Smith," she answered. "They'll tell you where it is. Be quick!"

We fooled the waiting crowd, which

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would have started things all over, by having cabs fetched. The horses, fed chiefly on sand and date straw, could just about trot, and the *Daisy's* crew made a rear-guard. In twenty minutes we were sitting in deep basket chairs beneath the *Daisy's* snowy awning, drinking long drinks out of frosty glasses and eying Port Said and its squalid pretentiousness as if it and we had not even dislike in common.

"Explain the telegram," Grace Vandam demanded, sitting down in front of us.

A darky maid had already rouged and powdered the bruise out of sight.

She was pretty enough in all conscience. Will did the talking. I took stock of her—the first nice American girl I had seen at close quarters. She was an eye-opener. I wondered why Will left the States, until Aunty Elmira Vandam came out; middle-aged, dressed to look thirty or thirty-five and in love with vivacity. One realized at once that roses had thorns in the United States also.

"Aunty, we're going to Barabbas Island!"

"Mercy, child, where's that?"

"Nobody knows."

"I'll have to know who I'm going with before I start off on that trip!"

Will realized he had not introduced any one. He began at once with Monty and it dawned on the dazzled aunty that she sat next a member of the House of Lords. She did not get anybody else's name and never overcame the impression that the rest of us were in the footman class.

Our luggage came aboard before Monty quite succumbed under the flow of aunty's gush and he seized the excuse to stand by the gangway and count things. I went and stood by him. Grace Vandam stepped between us.

"Poor aunty suffers dreadfully from heat," she said. "She lies in her stateroom and pants when the glass goes over eighty-five. Is the Red Sea very hot? I've heard so."

We did not let our luggage go below yet. There was a simple man, with one simple rule of life and the courage to follow it, to be interviewed first. Captain John McGraw knew nothing whatever of English lords except by hearsay and reading of their peccadillos in the Portland, Maine, Sunday papers; so he kept his cabin on the bridge-deck, and we had to go to him there, like schoolboys bearding the head-master.

"Never heard o' Barabbas Island. It's not on the chart."

But Monty had procured a Turkish chart from somewhere and had persuaded somebody to underscore the names with the corresponding English characters. Careful comparison of charts showed where Barabbas Island was.

"I'll not go there! A savage coast—uncharted water—hot—unhealthy—you tell Miss Vandam to go get another captain if she wants to make that trip!"

"Nonsense, John!" Grace Vandam stepped in through the open door and took a seat on the captain's desk-chair. "I'll not listen to your croaking. To hear you talk one would think I was a child in arms."

"You're little better!" he grumbled.

"To be told what to do, where to go, what to eat, when to go to bed, instead of owner of this yacht! Just because you were father's captain and he gave in to you in every little thing is no reason why you shouldn't obey me! This yacht is going to Barabbas Island and you're to take her there!"

"Listen to me, miss!"

"I've done nothing but listen to you all the voyage! I've had no fun at all! You've turned a joy-ride into a funeral procession! Not allowed to go ashore without two men in attendance, just as if papa were still giving orders."

"What happened, miss? Is your face bruised? Had your own way today, I think. As for your pa still giving orders, he and I spoke last afore he died. I've kep' my word and I'll keep it!"

Her eyes sparkled and his grew worried. Simply he had promised. Simply he spoke now. And he blundered simply and was aware of it, with sailor simplicity that recognized a fact but could not help itself.

"Will you find me another captain?" she asked him.

"No, miss."

He looked away.

"Papa knew I would make this trip."

"Not to no Barabbas Island I'll bet he didn't!"

"He didn't care where I went as long as you promised to go with me. Dear John—all I want is a good time—something really exciting—just to get away from the street signs and keep-to-the-rights for once! Besides, where's the danger? You know how to navigate. If anything goes wrong with

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you, there's Arthur, and then Smith; they've both got certificates. And if there's trouble with natives, what fun! Let's get that quick-firer out from under the hatch and mount it!"

"No, miss. We've no letters of marque against pirates."

"D'you mean that in case of attack you wouldn't defend the yacht?"

"I don't say a word o' that, miss." He shut his shaven lips with a grim snap. "What I do say is Barabbas Island is no place to take yachts or young ladies to!"

"We ought to back out," whispered Monty behind his hand.

"Leave me alone with him, please!" the girl demanded, and we trooped out on to the bridge.

Being last, I heard her first words.

"Now, John, are we friends or enemies?"

"We ought to back out," Monty repeated, not with much regret I thought.

"If we do," said Will, "she'll go without us. I know her of old!"

FIVE minutes later she emerged triumphant from the captain's cabin and called us in to further conference. With fine generalship she had yielded to the captain's native honesty and overridden his rebellious mood by accepting a precaution we would have insisted on anyhow. Paper, pens and ink lay ready on the table and John McGraw sat ready to draw the terms.

"Whatever you and he agree to, I will sign!" she said, starting below with a gay laugh. "John is an old bear, but he takes commissions and credits them to me to keep expenses down! Beat him if you can!"

But we could play at that game. We left Monty to do our bargaining and followed her down to the long armchairs beneath the awning.

"Let's hope your man proves easy," said Will.

"Why?" she asked naively. "Do you need money?"

"Monty does."

"Oh! Is he poor?"

"He's our financier."

"Then what in the world——"

"The poor chap has only about thirty thousand a year of private income."

"Pounds?"

"No, dollars. He needs a fortune to reopen the ancestral towers in proper style. So many of his people have been soldiers that the estate's plumb impoverished. 'Tween you and me, he's not half so keen as we are. We like him awfully well. We want to see him——"

"What? You too?"

"Why not? I'm nuts on seeing him make millions!"

She jumped up and clapped her hands.

"Hurrah! Splendid! Then that's settled! We'll go to the island, find the treasure and give it all to him to run his earldom with! Stay here while I run up and tell John what to put down on paper!"

But Monty met her on the way, coming down the ladder with a folded paper in his hand.

"That didn't take long," he said, laughing. "Your captain is a man of sound principle, Miss Vandam. Anything we find is to be divided in three thirds, after the expenses from this port and back again have been charged against the whole. One third to the owner. One third to the officers and crew pro rata. One third to us. Nothing could be fairer."

"Nothing could be meaner, you mean! Give me that paper! Whoever heard of such a thing! What? You won't let me change the terms? Oh, very well, I shall simply give you my share, that's all! I won't hear of having the expenses charged! This is a pleasure trip! You're my guests!"

"When do we start?" asked Monty with a nervous glance toward the quay.

"We shall have to wait our turn through the ditch," said our hostess. "Are you seeing ghosts?"

"Worse than a ghost! I've seen Grogan Guthrie. He stood on the quay there. No mistaking him. Hullo! Here comes a boat."

A smart launch hissed alongside and a note was passed up for the Earl of Montdidier and Kirkudbrightshire, P. C. Monty tore it open and read it twice.

"That magistrate's a very decent chap," he said. "He writes today that Guthrie came by the same train we did—didn't see him, Fred, did you?—that he saw the fracas we were in and has already wired to Cairo for the best lawyer he can get to come and make trouble for us. Meanwhile he has engaged a local man to apply, in the names of twenty of the inhabitants, for a writ preventing us from leaving, pending damage suits. Philosopher he

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may be. Cad he is. We'd all better go ashore again, Miss Vandam; otherwise they'll arrest the yacht and hold you, too."

"Nonsense!" She jumped up and stamped her foot. "Steam is up." She caught sight of the first mate leaning over the bridge-rail. "Are all hands on board?" she asked him.

"Yes, miss."

"Then get up anchor and steam back into the Mediterranean!"

But the process was not quite so simple as she thought. The yacht had to get clearance papers. Captain or owner had to go ashore to get them.

So Captain John McGraw tumbled into the steam tender and I went along with him to send a cautionary telegram to the banker at Alexandria who held the bulk of our united funds. The very first man I recognized after we had made our way through the swarm of longshore guides, beggars and mountebanks was the mandarin. Like Guthrie, he must have traveled on our train. He was coming down the hotel steps with the bowed head and introspective manner that he affected without in the least reducing his powers of observation.

He saw me before I saw him—changed his course so as to pass me close enough to be heard—and turned into a tobacco store.

"I wish to speak to you," he said as if thinking aloud.

Nobody else could have guessed he meant the remark for me. Captain McGraw was quite unsuspicious.

"We've no time for buying cigarets, sir!" he objected as I turned to follow the Chinaman. "Besides, the yacht's stores include more luxuries o' every kind than twice our number could get through in a year."

"All the same—" I said and turned into the shop.

McGraw followed me in, very suspicious of Port Said shops but mindful that he had a guest of Miss Vandam's in tow. I got the impression that nothing less than personal responsibility for my safety would have induced him to darken the door.

JUST inside, where the shadow was deepest, the Chinaman waited, and McGraw was almost startled into striking him.

"If life is so dangerous for you," said the Chinaman, smiling ironically, "consider my condition. Your fist looks heavier than any weapon I might be supposed to have. To do the first kindness seems riskier than to strike the first blow. I have advice for you."

"I've got along for fifty years without much Chink advice," McGraw answered impatiently.

The Chinaman ignored the pleasantry and turned to me.

"Prof. Guthrie," he said, "has set his heart on being first at Barabbas Island. The magistrate of this place can be dilatory when he chooses but I imagine there are limits. He is besieged at present by witnesses who clamor for legal action, and Guthrie is paying the lawyer's bill. The lawyer has been to the bank to ask whether you have funds in this place. You would better hurry!"

I stood irresolute. I could not imagine what the Chinaman's purpose could be.

"You want us out of your way," I said. "Why?"

"Y, my young friend, is a letter of your English alphabet," he answered. "Standing alone, it means as nearly nothing as anything in this world can. I have told you of Barabbas Island. That yacht to take you there— Oh, you should take swift advantage!"

"What if the yacht isn't going there?" I countered, and for a moment he eyed me curiously.

At the end of that time I was aware that he was not in the least deceived.

"If you should appear to steam toward Europe," he said, "there would be a lapse of hue and cry."

He terminated the interview then by turning his back on us and walking toward the counter. More than ever mystified as to his purpose, I followed McGraw to the shipping office, where he found an American captain, who promised to send the telegram I signed with a code signature, thus completely throwing the enemy off that trail. Half an hour later we were back on board and the anchor chain was coming in noisily.

"Lapse of hue and cry is sheer buncome!" said Monty when I had told what happened ashore. "There's no understanding Chinamen. But that particular mandarin believes too little in the genuineness of human motives to be anything but a schemer himself. If we steam away and return, we simply give them time. When

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re come back they'll be ready for us and re'll know nothing of what they've cooked p for us in the meantime."

"Let's go ashore, then, and see the rouble through," suggested Will. "Running away is no way to win games."

"No?" says Monty. "If you'd played hess with that mandarin you'd change your mind."

It was at that point that Gracie Vandam ame to the rescue with wholly United States vision—seeing the thing in its broadest aspect possible.

"Isn't Africa an island?" she demanded.

We all laughed.

"Counting the Suez Canal as sea," said Monty, "I suppose it is. Have you any idea how large it is?"

"No. Who minds the size! Can't we steam right round it? Can't we come up to this Barabbas Island from the other side?"

"Weeks and weeks!" said Monty, shaking his head.

"Are you so old that a little matter of weeks disturbs you?" she retorted. "Won't Mundidger Towers stand until you come?"

One does not feel the force of great decisions while they are making, and we discussed that tremendous proposal from the mouth of a twenty-three-year-old girl without the least attempt at gravity. Only Aunty Vandam took the prospect seriously.

"I'll be all out of everything I need before we're half-way!" she insisted.

But nobody minded her necessities.

The Port Said mole slid past us, with its statue of Lesseps introducing West to East. We gained speed as we cut clean water, and a little launch that might or might not carry a detention warrant gave up the pursuit. A rather pompous darky steward came and thundered on a deep gong the command to dress for dinner.

"And my hair will take hours!" said aunty, running off, whereat we blessed her hair, wordlessly unanimous.

"It amounts to this," said Fred Oakes, and I knew which way he would vote by the way he reveled in the enormity of the whole thing. "We stand invited to steam all the way round a continent on this young lady's yacht, with a pretty probable fight at the far end——"

"Sure!" said Will. "Guthrie will think we've flunked. He'll get there first. When he finds we weren't afraid after all he'll be riled worse than Mount Vesuvius!"

"And the merest shadow of a tale of treasure to tempt us," said I. "The unlikeliest tale four men ever listened to. Are we game? We are? We accept? We do! Then I vote we go and dress!"

"Hurry!" urged Grace Vandam. "The chef gets furious if anybody's late!"

III

SO WE four, who had thought ourselves heirs to earth's rough quarters, whose luxuries of late had been reduced to odd days in unspeakable hotels, entered on eight long weeks of what Fred diagnosed as "La-di-da."

I had bought a dress suit in Alexandria and the others had theirs—of ancient vintage—packed in steel cases with the creases of accumulating years grown almost permanent. We dressed for dinner, changed our clothes between meals and lay abed as long as we wanted to. It was astonishing how soon and strongly that demoralizing habit grew.

The *Daisy* was unlike anything whatever in the world except the yacht of a United States millionaire. She was the ultimate of everything, comfort included. Twin, quadruple expansion engines could send her through the water just about one knot faster than the Cunard's latest crack. She had a vast refrigerating-plant and every kind of bath the skin of hot humanity could yearn for and the mind of engineers invent.

There were push-buttons all along the deck, in order that enervated passengers might ring for a steward and refreshments without troubling to rise. And the library of seven thousand volumes contained only editions de luxe.

There was a grand piano in the music room and a little balcony above the dining saloon from which the yacht's orchestra of six very fair musicians discoursed at meals. The wines were excellent, the tobacco better and the cooking best of all, for an enormous black expert from Maryland tyrannized over the galley and wrought miracles thrice daily. Not that there were only three meals a day; there was food served hot whenever anybody thought of it.

If we had only had fine weather it would

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have been a voyage such as a man should make but once, to look back to and keep in mind as his standard of heaven on earth. But between Alexandria, where we ran in to withdraw funds from the bank, and Cape Town, where we spent a week ashore, there were exactly three days when they did not rig fiddles on the saloon table. From Cape Town to Durban there were none. After Durban we ran into a typhoon, and that was scarcely more than herald to our serious adventures.

There is a well-defined belief among buyers of Cook's excursion tickets that the Mediterranean is a sun-warmed mill-pond, incapable of wrath. We stood alternately on nose and heel all down the length of it until cylinders primed because of racing propellers and the engine-room staff discussed birth-control and suicide at meals.

Through the Straits of Gibraltar we pitched like a Deal lugger coming in with a storm against the tide. And outside the Strait we met a genuine sou'wester, come all the way from America without meeting anything to squander fury on. We took that on our beam.

Down past Madeira we rolled gunwale under—enjoyed a three-day respite in the neighborhood of Teneriffe—and then bucked our beautiful nose into a skin-rasper fresh from the antarctic and wallowed into Cape Town with blistered funnels and white spars, two boats washed away and the shovels snarling on the bunker floors to scrape up the last few hundredweights of coal.

Captain John McGraw took stern delight in it all—not that he liked the beastly weather or the incessant watch and risk, but he hoped to give his young mistress more than enough of it, believing the weeks of discomfort would change her mind. And never in the world did a man miscalculate more wildly.

With the storms her courage grew. Aunty Vandam spent the whole trip in her stateroom and as chaperon was about as useful as the awnings rolled up and ready for warm, calm days that never came. But Gracie was not the girl to need a chaperon. The United States is the only land that raises boys and girls together and so turns out women honestly incapable of understanding why they are not safe among their equals of either sex.

There was not even the seed of a flirtation sown on all that trip, nor—excepting the day when Gracie fell down the main companion and lay stunned for an hour or two—one dull minute. Perhaps the wildest sprees were the theatricals, held with the ship rolling thirty-five degrees and the whole of the watch below impressed for audience.

She acted Romeo for choice, with a false moustache, to Fred's Juliet—beard and all. When a specially wild roll brought Fred down headlong from the balcony in the middle of the love scene, there was nothing lacking, not even Fred's language, to make joy complete.

She had the gift of laughter. Not the conventional sort that grows noisy at the ordinary, cut-and-dried jokes. Conventional humor could not hold her attention. But the unexpected jest—quaint, unplanned reversals of the usual—unpremeditated, chance things that tickled imagination—and burlesque of the rowdiest type had power to reduce her to squeals and giggles like those of a child being tickled.

Fred Oakes, born to the social summit and whole-souled loather of his birthright as a rule, was in an element here that he liked. His concertina out-brayed the grand piano, overrode the clang of the engine-room at times and even jerked out tortured music in the belly of the bunkers, when the coal came down in avalanches from the upper shelves and a brave man's life was worth a second's purchase. Then, grimy with dust and grease, he would return to the saloon and act clown, unwashed, to Grace Vandam's King Solomon.

Ninety per cent. of our high spirits were born of sure knowledge that she was getting what she came for. When the ship pitched and rolled too wildly for any one to keep his feet, we sat in the music room and spun yarns she unbelieving at first, and after that—when she realized we had seen and done too many things to need invent—almost beside herself with all the emotions that combine into go-fever. When go-fever fastens on to courage there is no holding down the victim.

Cape Town after that was bathos. We dug out aunty and took her ashore to recover. There we were all known—even Grace was known by name—and they got up a round of labeled gaiety while the yacht was coaled and something or other was

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fitted in the engine-room—well-meant, expensive, social-conscious stuff that made Fred sick at heart.

We were only all merry together once, when we left aunty with the social gang and climbed old Table Mountain, with a man and his wife who knew the tracks to guide us—spending a night on top with a scanty camp-fire to keep feet from growing numb—a red ring of burning mountain-flank below us and the naked, swinging stars for company. Little we thought of Barabbas Island that night, or of mandarins or professors of Egyptology. Yet we were within closer touch of all of them than we guessed.

WHEN we came down from the mountain, it was to find a man at the Mount Nelson who fingered a cablegram nervously and eyed us one by one as if he did not like his job.

"I am an attorney. I am instructed to say," he began, "er— I have a long cablegram here—to say that Prof. Grogan Guthrie has already been to er—I think it says Barabbas Island—some such place—and has returned to Suez on an Egyptian Government steamer with everything worth bringing away. I am to say your yacht was reported passing Gibraltar and your purpose to steam round Africa was guessed. Everything has been done to make your trip useless. A hot reception from the natives, in the event of your continuing the voyage, is a moral certainty."

"Do you believe a word of that yourself?" asked Monty.

The man laughed.

"I have been retained by cable by the other side," he said, "to deliver the message. That is now done. If you want to retain me to give an opinion, legal or merely human, my office is on Adderley Street!"

"Very well," said Monty. "I suppose you'll send word you've delivered the message?"

"Within ten minutes. After that I am free to serve you, if you wish."

"All right. Send your own wire first. Then send this: 'Yacht needs repair. Party's original intentions abandoned. Warning came too late to make any difference.'"

The lawyer charged ten pounds in addition to the rate per word for sending that truthful if deceptive telegram. They were ten pounds thoroughly well spent. After that we drove down to the docks to find out whether the needed repairs were yet finished and, finding they were, we steamed next day into the teeth of an antarctic wind that raised the thunders on Greenpoint rocks and buried us in icy spray.

We rolled, bucked and kicked our way to Durban through perpetual storms that ceased only when we lay alongside and took coal from the blunt-bowed floats. And in that sun-warmed, trim little harbor Grace Vandam met and weathered a storm of another kind.

John McGraw's lips and eyes were growing stern again, and it was quite clear that the mates and engineers stood with him, although theirs were dumb protests, expressed chiefly in surly answers to chance questions and averted eyes.

"I had hoped, miss," said the skipper bluntly at lunch three days after we tied up the Durban quay, "that you'd be tired o' the foolishness afore this."

She had asked him how long it must be before we pressed forward.

For answer she mocked him, jeered at him, laughed him to shame that a sea-dog should quail where a girl dared go on eagerly.

"Any fool dares when he's ignorant o' what he's up against!" he growled. "Settin' aside uncharted water an' the reefs near Barabbas, you've a sullen crew and discontented officers. That's no makin's o' success."

"It seems I've a scare-cat on the bridge!" she retorted hotly.

"I'm not afraid o' bein' called names!" he answered. "A fool's way is a fool's way, and that's no other than the course you're orderin' me to lay!"

She sat at the head of her own table with the air of a woman who had done the same for twenty years instead of about that many weeks, but for a moment I thought she was going to appeal to Monty on her right. John McGraw seemed to think he had beaten down her rash spirit at last.

"It's no womanly thing to do," he said, "to risk this yacht and the lives aboard her, all for a whimsy!"

"Very well," she answered, rising to face him. He had stood by her chair on the way from his own table to the companion. "You shall have your way. I'll risk neither yacht nor your precious skin. Take the yacht back to the States and lay her up."

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"Ah!" he said. "That's better, miss! But no need to lay her up. Take a cruise across to Rio. Steam around the Horn if you will."

"Take her back and lay her up, I say! These gentlemen and I will charter some kind of boat here for our purpose and go on without having to suffer every day or two from your nerves and the crew's cold feet! Take the *Daisy* to New York now and lay her up!"

"No, miss!" he answered. John McGraw was not made of the stuff that runs away, whatever his expressed opinions. "Get ye a new captain if that's the lay of it. I'll not leave you! If ye're set, then so'm I. But I've warned ye. There'll come trouble of it!"

"Bah! Trouble!" she answered. "Show me some!"

So John McGraw submitted and began there and then to bulldoze mates and crew into acquiescence. We steamed out of Durban with the nearest approach to unanimous good temper the ship's company had known for very many days.

The weather promised fair at last. Fred's concertina set to work vibrations that stirred echoes in men's breasts, so that even the second engineer, who was made up mostly of mock-dignity and disagreeable remarks, did a step dance. Probably all would have gone thenceforward as smoothly as a wedding but for the lost typhoon.

McGRAW said it was a "lost" one because it "weren't the typhoon season, nor yet that the track of 'em." It was a crazy, unannounced, unrighteous thing strayed out of the China Seas, born out of time and doubly wrathy. The glass began falling suddenly, as if inches were ten-thousandths, and the thermometer rose at about the same pace. Then, before half the loose deck-gear could be lashed, in heat that had us pouring sweat and gasping like caught fish, the fury burst on us.

Sudden darkness made the world seem a tiny sphere of whirling black cloud and water. Walls of sea rose high above us on either hand—sea that screamed and was smooth in places like polished marble because of the weight of wind.

Then our motion ceased to bear any resemblance to that of a ship and all sound became swallowed in the womb of Noise, all sight in chaos, and three men went overboard, blown like the rags of the awnings. It would have been more nearly possible to bridle the typhoon with bit and rein than to save those deck-hands.

One by one the boats went; first those in the davits, then the bigger ones that rode on blocks on the upper deck, ripped away like weightless things. Next the foremast went overboard, snapped off a foot above the deck, and lay alongside, pounding at every plunge like the hammer of Thor. Fred, Will and I took the place of the three lost deck-hands and fought for our lives with the tangled rigging, cutting it clear at last.

And then the mainmast went in a smother of sea that boiled on the funnel until the stays drew taut as a knife-edge. We went down again, this time with Monty and four seamen, led by the second mate, and cut that spar free while the ship did her best to turn turtle.

None of us knew how we won our way back to the upper deck and comparative safety. I remember how I blessed my luck, waist-deep, clinging for dear life to a stanchion, as I heard a crash and felt the tremor of coal shifting in the bunkers, and thought of the fellows below. It is better to see the teeth of death than to wrestle between steel walls in the dark. None could go below to help them. None could come up through the locked steel hatches. Hell knows more torments than the water-cure.

Grace Vandam saw the fight through from the upper bridge, strapped to a stanchion from which the canvas shield had been blown away by the first fury of wind. After what seemed a million years I worked my way along and tried to yell to her to crawl into the chart-house, but the storm snatched the words out of my teeth, and I had to cling, as the horse-breaker grips leather, to save myself from crashing into her and breaking perhaps the wet, straining strap around her waist and her hold as well as mine.

She looked like a wild woman with her hair to all four quarters and a man's torn oilskins snapping in yellow streamers from her in the wind. There was not in attitude or expression as much as a hint of fear. She clung to the stanchion with determination—excitement—almost with delight—her white teeth set in a grin that was more than three parts courage.

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I have observed since then many a time that it is not woman who is afraid of the material elements. She fears and screams at things that to men seem not realities at all. It is men who know the grisly price the elements exact, who fear them even while they fight—woman who exults in the savagery.

There are decadents of either sex—fewer than some profess to think, and yet too many; but I speak of the women and men who are each their own stern judges—the decent folk—the fellows we can strive with without rancor or contempt and the women whose opinion of us makes us search our hearts in secret.

Grace Vandam no more feared that typhoon than she could have faced without whimpering the thought of being cut off from kith and kin. Sometime sailor before the mast, contented with disinheritance, I shivered in ghastly fright with every side-sweeping plunge of the ship and at each new screaming wall of smoke-gray water. She, who might have flinched at terrors I should laugh at defiantly, herself laughed where I feared.

Aunty Vandam, on the other hand, a decadent, clung to her cabin bed and died ten deaths a minute, lamentably, noisily.

We did not find the ever-to-be-recommended, too elusive center of the typhoon, where stillness is said to reign because the chaos needs a vortex around which to hurl itself. Rather we battled through the fiercest, swiftest rage, the twin propellers flogging up the spume to mingle with shrieking clouds, scarcely our superstructure—scarcely our thick funnel visible through smothering water for more than a minute at a time.

The havoc on deck was a bagatelle to what took place below, but of that we knew nothing until after the typhoon had spent itself and left us stricken on a heaving waste. They kept the engines turning by dint of unimaginable courage and resource and so made possible John McGraw's forlorn hope—to stand away from reefs and shoals into the open sea.

But the next day we buried, in sewed-up canvas hammocks with fire-bars to their feet, seven of the engine-room contingent, three scalded beyond recognition, one mangled in the moving steel and the others crushed. A day later we dug a flattened body out from under an avalanche of shifted coal.

There was scarcely a man below decks who had not an injury to show. The galley fires were scattered on the cooks. The fire-extinguisher broke loose and fractured a steward's leg. The unbruised in the engine-room were scalded and the wounds men got in the bunkers varied all the way from a broken arm to cuts from a dead man's shovel.

We became a floating hospital with pumps that clacked interminably while the less seriously injured and the merely bruised made shift to get us under weigh again. It was three days before the sea ceased raging—five before they had rebushed a main-shaft bearing and restuffed a dozen wheezing valves. By that time we had drifted to somewhere near the middle of the Indian ocean and it became a problem which port to make for, to refit and sign new men.

We decided on Bombay after long discussion of the pros and cons and were all gloomy all the long way there, wheezing an unsteady thirteen knots, Grace Vandam depressed because we laughed no longer and Aunty Elmira in a state of strident mutiny against everything and everybody not United States American.

She vowed it was our nationality—the crimes of England and the curse of kings that had brought down vengeance on us from the skies. She bewailed the *Daisy's* injuries as Rachel bewailed her children and, reversing her adoration of Monty, refused to speak to him—except that she talked at him nasaly and noisily whenever chance brought them near enough.

JOHN McGRAW was perhaps the least troubled. He left the first mate on the bridge one morning and came to where Monty was standing on deck with Fred and Will and me, smiling with a sort of horse-trade expression that would have put a born fool on his guard.

"Bombay very soon now," he said, addressing the remark to all of us.

So we all four grunted noncommittally and left him with the conversation still to open. But that did not disconcert him. He opened it like an oyster, by main force applied with a sharp instrument to the proper spot without unnecessary preface.

"I've been studyin' the contract," he

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said, facing us all with both hands behind him.

"You're late in the day, if your idea is to change it," Monty answered.

"Naw," he said dryly. "We're agreed on that then. Changin' is barred out. She stands as written."

"Stands as spoken," said Fred. "If you've lost your copy you may look at ours, and if that goes overboard we'll live up to every line of it!"

"Good enough!" remarked John McGraw dryly. "Good enough! Then you'll not gainsay that lawful expenses o' this trip are to come out o' your pockets!"

"I take issue there," said Monty. "Expenses are to be charged according to contract against the total proceeds before making division. Is that what you mean?"

"I do not! Ye took no typhoons into reckonin', but I did! I made the stipulations, and I dare bet there are lawyers ashore as 'll take my view! Ye're liable, accordin' to what ye've signed, for yer pro rata share o' the cost o' these repairs in Bombay."

He waited more than a minute for the full enormity of that announcement to sink in, but no one answered him.

"Repairs—accordin' to my way o' sizing it up—are goin' to cost a heap o' money—likely twice as much in Bombay as they would in New York. She'll need a through an' through overhaul. Ye've got to foot y'r full third o' that bill!"

We did not answer. It would have been Monty's place to do that, and it was never his plan to check the discovery of what an enemy intended.

"Miss Vandam can well afford it," McGraw continued, pretty obviously stopping what he considered the worst hole in his own argument; "but writing 's writing and law's the law. Ye've one chance, and only one."

"I don't see any chance," said Monty, unstopping the hole again. "Who would take advantage of our hostess?"

"Oh yes, ye've one. The contract reads we're to voyage to Barabbas Island. If we shouldn't, then the contract 'ud be broken and you couldn't be held to the terms of it. So now, gents, if you'll take my side in the argument with Miss Vandam and help me talk her out o' this Barabbas foolishness, ye'll save y'rselves a heap o' money!"

Monty laughed and pulled out his cigar-case.

"Take one!" he said. "I wouldn't bet on your law half as confidently as on your navigation. As you say—typhoons aren't mentioned in the contract. We never thought of them. But my friends and I propose to foot half, not a third, of these repairs. As for continuing the trip, we'll stand neutral. If Miss Vandam goes forward, we'll go. If you can talk her out of it, we'll release her from the contract. Are you satisfied?"

"No," he said grimly. "Not yet. But I'll name ye. Ye're gentlemen! Here comes Miss Gracie herself. Mind—ye promise to stand neutral. Mark what I say to her."

"Morning, John!" she nodded cheerfully. "I was looking for you to tell you what my plans are."

"Here's hoping ye've changed 'em, miss," he answered, making shift to put on a paternal air.

"I have. You'll stay at Bombay and see to the repairs and refitting. These gentlemen may stay or come with me as they see fit. I'm going to hire a smaller steamer in Bombay and make the Barabbas trip while the *Daisy* is being fixed. Now, don't look at me in that way, John! You may go back home if you'd rather, and now you know!"

"Now wouldn't that beat the measles!" muttered John McGraw, turning away dejectedly with both hands in his pockets.

IV

IT WAS one of Grace Vandam's strongest and most likable characteristics that she was willing to change details of her strategy at a second's notice without ever losing sight of the main idea or relaxing determination.

The minute we stood on the stonework of the Apollo Bunder in Bombay we were in a sphere where Monty could command whatever prestige and influence can do for a man—in a land where the one begets the other and both take precedence of mere ambition.

The clubs were ours. All officialdom was at our service. The Royal navy knew a hundred ways of making yacht repairs less costly and more thorough. And there were officers in the Royal navy—very

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bright-eyed, soft-speaking gentlemen, made lean by fevers and alert by responsibility—who knew strange tales of stranger seas and would tell, if they liked you well enough.

Most of them fell in love with Grace Vandam, it being a British navy privilege to lose its gallant heart as often as lovely woman heaves in sight, and Monty, simply by being what he was, held the key to their silences.

Fred Oakes, too, was a man after the British navy's heart—a wandering maker of unclassic music—singer of uncensored songs—gently bred and roughly weaned adventurer, with deeds to his credit that would stand unctuous hair on end and a wholly honest distaste for praise or for any reference to his virtues. Will Yerkes and I sat in, as it were, being unknown quantities, accepted without reserve for sake of the men who introduced us.

Those were days—and nights and mornings even, when we sat on the old *Magdala's* deck and watched the paling stars—of unconfined imagination and unrestrained romance. There was not a tale they tell in all those seas that we did not hear three versions of; not a chart they did not let us pore over; not a rare, dim photograph we were not shown; not a torn, thumbed, folded letter we were not allowed to read. Sons of hanged Red Sea pirates were sent for and given lawless un-Islamic drinks, that they might tell us in the dim light under awnings what they knew or had heard or guessed of Barabbas Island.

Grace Vandam grew feverish with the boundless fascination, and it is not the Royal navy's way to quench approved desire or to pour cold water on good courage.

"Only one stipulation I make," she insisted again and again. "We're to go there! We're to get there! How I don't care! Go I will!"

So Monty was not limited by too explicit orders as to local steamers and native crews. Aunty Elmira was handed over to a fat, debt-laden sub-lieutenant—for his sins—to be shown the official sights and do the social round, while we searched strange water-fronts together and held converse with the captains of unusual, mainly unpainted craft.

In the end we took the advice of a navy man whose intimate knowledge of those ships and seas was keen enough to compel the respect of Arabs—and that is harder to win than the viceroy's cup or a Hugli pilot's certificate. He led us down to a smelly wharf in an ancient part of town, where a rakish two-masted sailing-ship lay on the mud between green stone walls.

"She can show heels to many a steamer," he told us. "Her skipper and owner is Osman bin Omar, part Arab, part Turk, part Seedeebay, with a dash of something else—sportsman all ends up—particular according to his lights, which are red and green. That's to say he'd rather die than not cheat a landsman but he'll play straight cricket if he's sure you know the sea. His ship was a French yacht once. I don't know how he came by her. He changed the rig and name and gets a living with her in devious ways; but he keeps out of jail, and the little ship's bottom is as clean as his own prayer mat. I'm told he prays five times a day—three times to Allah and twice to the devil of the Christians. See if you can't come to terms with him."

To our surprize Osman bin Omar talked English, after a terse fashion of his own. He stuck to English, especially after Fred surprized him with a rich flow of Arabic, seeming to prefer to fight out the bargain on our domain rather than his. He showed us over the little ship with the manner of a prince, his bright brown eyes glittering appreciation of what he had to offer. And each of us, Grace Vandam included, took a turn at knocking lumps from the sum he named as his minimum per month for charter.

Eastern bargains, alongshore or on land or sea, are not made in an hour or two or overnight. We stuck to him for two hours and then withdrew and stayed away, sweating anxiety, for three days, until Osman bin Omar himself threw caution to the dogs and came to call on us at the hotel. Then the war of words began again, Will Yerkes commencing with the statement that we did not want to buy the —— ship.

"She ship not ——; she blessed, she not for sale!" he answered. "Barabbas —— bad place; get —— big price."

In the end we beat him down to half his original demand and, still loudly calling him a thief, led him in triumph to the naval man who had introduced us. Under his wise eye a Parsee lawyer drew a contract,

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Osman bin Omar disputing every point with threats of suicide because of our exceeding exactions and seeking persistently to write in shameless extortions of his own—as for instance, that we should pay the crew's wages in addition to the charter price, he having already stipulated that the fabulous price agreed on was inclusive.

"He fights now," said our mentor, "but he'll live up to the terms agreed on if I know him."

Finally, when we had fought out every clause of the agreement word by word and the Parsee had almost finished writing two fair copies of it all, the navy man sprang a surprize that reduced Osman bin Omar to the verge of speechlessness.

"Write now," he ordered the Parsee, "that the party of the second part shall take along ten U. S. seamen chosen from the crew of the yacht *Daisy*, who shall not be required to work ship or obey the orders of the party of the first part but may do so if so requested and if so ordered by the party of the second part."

"Why you want 'em?" demanded Osman when outraged caution permitted speech to escape him.

"None of your business!" said the navy man. "It goes in or we charter some other ship!"

OSMAN stormed and argued. We were adamant. From our point of view ten white sailors were none too many to take our part against the sixteen nearly naked sons of pirates who would man the Arab's yards. In the end, however, he refused pointblank, vowed there was no room on his ship for that many extra passengers and took himself off in a fury.

"Don't let that worry you," said our mentor. "No; don't send after him, Miss Vandam. Come and dine and dance on the *Magdala*. He'll be back tomorrow morning."

And so he was—too early, causing us to be aroused from the delicious deeps of slumber that follow on dancing in Bombay's hot humidity until the peep o' day.

"I allow you two sailor-man, not one —— man more!" he announced.

Gracie was "tickled to death with him"—wanted to offer him breakfast—hot coffee at least—and to agree there and then to his condition. But we were a trifle more experienced in driving Eastern bargains and added to our tale, demanding that twelve men come with us instead of ten. The discussion that followed might easily have been mistaken by the uninitiated for a difference between umpire and the bleachers at a dog-fight.

Aunty Elmira Vandam came down and demanded that Grace come away from listening to such awful language. Fingers snapped. The "damns" and "blasts" and other words that help make the longshore English language picturesque exploded regardless of folk at breakfast or the bishop's chaplain vainly attempting to read the *Times*. We accused Osman bin Omar of nameless intentions on the high seas, and he us of crimes and habits that he did not hesitate to name.

And finally—suddenly—we all agreed on five men as the only number of U. S. sailors any one in his senses would dream of taking and sent for the Parsee lawyer with mutual expressions of admiration and good-will. After that the only question left to be disputed was which side should pay the lawyer. Osman bin Omar, like a good sportsman, offered to toss coins for it. We agreed. He won. It was weeks before we learned that he beat us with a double-headed English penny.

Picking the five men we should take with us was easy. Grace Vandam did it in twenty minutes. With one stroke she eliminated all the married men, because, as she explained in an aside, that shut out John McGraw, the mates and the engineer officers. Then with wisdom like Solomon's she asked which unmarried men would rather be discharged and free to seek active employment than loaf in harbor while repairs were made.

Replies were fairly equally divided. There were nine who did not like the prospect of laziness. She eliminated four by having a British naval doctor pass on them and signed on the remaining five at double pay for the sailing trip. They were fine young fellows, three New Bedford men and two from Portland, Maine, all about as free from the sin of cowardice as birth and schooling can make a man.

After that we had to put the *Samaki*—the word means fish—in shape to carry two women passengers, stock her with civilized comforts and provisions and exchange Aunty Elmira Vandam for a

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chaperon less likely to be a Jonah. Persuading aunty proved impossible. She wept, railed and sent cablegrams to United States relatives. And nobody would take her in exchange. So in the end we left her flat, with leave to use her quarters on the yacht or do anything else she liked in reason, and took along the widow of a British officer—India is full of them—to whom a trip of any sort spelt blessed relief from pensioned pauperdom. Her name was Alice Ellis and she turned out trumps.

After that speed became sole object. We bought cabin fittings from a shipbreaker and constructed quarters for the women that were less intolerable than our portion of canvas hammocks swinging under beams. Will thought of rat-poison at the last minute and brought along a ten-pound can.

It was Monty who remembered bugbane and brought a large drum of some foul-smelling compound, on which a dozen sorts of insect pests were destined to grow strong and fat.

My last-minute contribution to the general weal was zinc ointment in a gallon jar—and faith we needed it before that voyage was through. Fred went aboard the night before we started and concealed canned kippered herring where no lascar prowling in search of something to give flavor to his curry would be likely to pounce on them.

We got away before dawn, too early for club folk and the idly curious but not for the *Sphinx* and her commander. That nearly-ready-to-be-superannuated gunboat steamed ahead of us with squattering paddles and sent us on our way at last with rousing cheers and waving helmets.

She was the last we saw of India. When we lost sight of her we settled down, Monty to everlasting chess by himself under a burlap awning and the rest of us to books, while the polyglot crew sang songs to the god of fair winds in time to the squeak and strain of the lateen spars.

We had found an astonishing number of books in Bombay on the subject of Biblical history, and some of them included guesses at who Barabbas might have been that, if not so wild as ours, had the merit of being based on study on the spot. Added to ours, they helped make up a story sufficiently romantic to offset even our discomfort in such a ship on such seas.

Ten days out from Bombay, when the heat and the glare across oily water had reduced us to speechless ill-temper that bugbites did nothing to soothe and Fred's concertina could only irritate, storms became our lot again.

At first we blessed them, for they filled our bellying sails and sent us boiling northwestward out of sight of Aden. But after the third day of wind there came a sandstorm—clouds of dry dust as sharp and hard as emery, ripped by the wind from the barren hills and hurled on pilgrims of the sea like one of Egypt's plagues.

The first storm left us and we shoveled sand off deck by the hundredweight. We ate two meals that did not make our gums bleed with the grinding grit. Then a second swept down, and a third. Sight became a matter of chance and snatched seconds. Watery eyes full of sharp sand and skin rendered raw by the blast are no aids to navigation.

Grace Vandam and Alice Ellis kept to the stove-hot cabin and knew only the misery of bugs, uncleanliness and prickly heat. I heard them laugh in spite of all those things.

Out in the driving sand we others leaned outboard and lent our aid to the keen, skinned Arab eyes, doing little good except to keep ourselves from "nerves," as men call panic. Time and again we knew that Osman bin Omar, the redoubtable, had lost himself. Time and again we saw him, by dint of luck, dead reckoning, chance glimpses of some shore mark or sight of a steamship driving through the storm, guess his position again.

Compass he had, but he did not use it much. The thing swung back and forward like a high volt electric indicator, demanding Art, with a capital A, to interpret its maneuvers. If he had any other navigating instruments he never produced them, and he thought more of the stars than all the other aids to seamen put together.

But one could not see the stars on those sand-stormy nights except for a glimpse now and then when bright blue planets seemed to race across black gaps in the dusty clouds. Once in the night we struck a reef and jumped clean over it, Osman shoving the helm hard over with the remark that that was "—— bad place." After that our seamen from the *Daisy* took turns at

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the helm, two together, not that they could see any better or knew anything about the course, but it gave us all more courage, themselves included—that being part of the white man's heritage.

Then there was mutiny. Nothing more serious at first than a mournfully couched demand by the native crew that we turn about and run for Bombay.

"They are saying bad ship, bad wind, bad grub, bad luck, bad journey," explained Osman.

"And you?" we asked him. "What do you say?"

"——!" was the answer. "Bad place ahead. Not good. Go back worse. Shipwreck—folk on Barabbas cut 'um throat. Not shipwreck—bad spirits come—maybe Christian devil—make —— of a time! Me brave man!"

CERTAINLY he was braver than his crew. He seemed to fear neither wreck, evil spirits, crew nor us. The native crew must have heard us talking of our destination, for the name of the place was on our lips everlastingly, but our pronunciation of it perhaps conveyed no meaning to their ears.

When Osman bin Omar said the word the nearest man snatched it up and passed it on. Within five minutes they were clamorous to know whether we were truly making for Barabbas. When the answer was yes, with a bunch of explosive oaths to drive it home, they mutinied there and then.

Mutiny is a strange passion with a lawlessness all its own, not governed by precedent or swayed by any motives of farsightedness. The first thing that occurred to any of them was to throw the two ladies overboard. I heard screams and entered the cabin through the poop hatch without waiting for invitation.

Grace Vandam and Alice Ellis were struggling in the grip of four sinewy lascars, fighting to keep themselves from being dragged on deck—to what fate they could scarcely guess. I being as much of a surprize to the lascars as they had been to the women, the rest of that session was one-sided. The nearest weapon was a chair; I broke it on the first man's head and laid out the three others with the remnants.

After that we got out firearms from the boxes in the hold and served out a repeating pistol each to our five New England seamen. We had not done that before because Osman bin Omar had assured us that sight of firearms would only whet cupidity, and his men were expert thieves. But now we set regular watches, and those of us not in the watch below became whips, as it were—the fist, flail and threat with which Osman could bully his crew.

The men I had brained with the chair-leg did not die, which was a mercy under the circumstances, for they went about with bandaged heads for an example to the others. The groans their throbbing aches gave rise to so far quelled the mutiny that Grace Vandam dared go alone and change the victims' bandages. But subjection is one thing, obedience another.

One man, when the storm lulled in the night-time, climbed aloft and, standing on the main yard with a hand on the mast, so that he looked crucified, jabbered about devils at the limit of his lungs, urging us all to die—so Osman said—before the evil spirits of Barabbas Island could catch us and carry us to hell forever. Then he set the example by plunging overboard with a scream that made the hearer's marrow creep within the spine.

Another man jumped after him over the stern and a third ran amuck, charging in the dark along the swaying deck, slashing at imaginary bogies with a long knife until Monty's fist took him neatly under the jaw-bone and he went overboard to join his friends.

Although the wind had dropped, the sea ran high. We wallowed without headway and the crew swore the drowned men were swimming around us, calling. We did hear the cry of sea-birds once or twice and the goose-flesh rose at the sound.

The lull in the storm gave Osman bin Omar his bearings again, for dawn showed land—high hot cliffs and boiling reefs. He swore he knew every fang protruding out of the swell and hugged the shore so close that we shuddered and grew ill with anxiety. There were sharks in hundreds all about us, and no ship could have lived long enough, once on the rocks, to have given passengers a chance.

Several times Fred tried to raise our spirits with mad music, but we only abused him for it. Monty dropped a hook and stout line overboard and caught a shark.

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The crew—who normally would have eaten shark greedily—denounced him for a bringer of bad luck. We hauled the line short, cut it through with an ax and let the shark go—proof enough that our nerves were getting frayed, although we made a bluff of seeming reckless.

Grace Vandam was as nervous by that time as any of us, but the need of seeming bold before the other woman kept her chin stiff. And of course we were not going to show a white feather in front of either of them.

"Is the sea around Barabbas anything like this?" I asked Osman by way of seeking comfort.

"—— sight worse!" he answered tersely.

"How far away is it?" I demanded.

For answer he puckered his eyes and after a long stare to the northward pointed to a scarcely visible prong of rock notched against the far horizon. It looked like part of the mainland.

"That sharp rock one side—worse shore-reefs other side—bad passage in between—come Barabbas!" he announced and then spat repeatedly with fervor.

I told the others. We all crowded forward to watch the island of our destiny lift out of distant glare. There returned to us something of the fascination. Our lateen spars and sails all golden in the sun were not, perhaps, so very much unlike those unremembered ones that rose over that horizon in the dawn of history. We forgot reefs, currents and the too unwilling crew—until the storm came down again like baffled hatred from the hot cliffs to the west.

It blew as Osman swore he had never known it, and the crew vowed all the devils of hell were combining to drive us back. The sea rose and the reefed sails ripped, until we anchored to try and ride it out. Then the anchor-cable parted where a sullen Arab mate forgot the parceling. When we let go the other anchor it fouled and dragged.

Osman bin Omar was a sailor from crown to heels—head, eyes and hands, as they say, but his crew was on fire with fear. Our five New England seamen built a drog for him out of a spare sail and spars and got it overboard in time to save us from wallowing on to the seaward line of reefs. That held our nose up-wind a while and steadied the rate of drift, providing us an hour or two to spare instead of minutes. Then Osman showed what he was made of.

He produced an old revolver and a whip of twisted wire, threatening with the one and with the other sparing neither kith nor kin. Like all Eastern skippers he had relatives in the crew and he struck them first and hardest. He made the blood squirt and his victims scream. Then, in the storm with the decks awash and the little ship rolling like a mad thing, he produced his contract and addressed himself to Grace Vandam.

"—— —— mess!" he shouted, shaking the contract under her nose. "You —— party of second part! You so permit!"

"Yes!" she answered. "Yes! I understand! Mills! Perkins! Hammond! Constable! Hewitt! Take his orders—do you hear me?"

"Aye, aye, miss!"

New England ran up to windward handily and Osman bin Omar laughed—a rare event with him. With oaths and blows, by dint of sheer brute hauling, we recovered the drog and got sail reset. Osman did not dare run and risk being pooped in those short, steep seas. He did the only thing a bold man could do—shoved his ship's nose right into the mess and beat up for the passage between mainland and Barabbas. We tacked a hundred times in ten miles—and tacking is no joke on a lateen-rigged ship—New England hauling on the sheets and putting enthusiasm into the laggard crew.

We made a great lagoon between the reefs ten minutes before dark and then, in proof of Osman's seamanship, paid off down a long narrow lane between sharp rocks toward where we could see Barabbas looming grim and unfriendly.

Night shut down on us as we raced through crazy seas toward a haven protected by a curving arm of rock. The cliffs of Barabbas loomed above us, blacker than the night. White water hissed and boiled on every hand. Somebody screamed "Oh—Allah!" in a voice like a drowning horse's.

"Hard over!" yelled one of the New England seamen, but Osman held the helm straight. Next, somebody close to me said—

"Oh, my God!"

Then the ship rose like a horse at a

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railing and we struck, in a smother of water and a noise like doomsday.

V

IT IS the looker-on who must describe a shipwreck. We were participants—victims, thrown down in the dark on a bucking deck amid the crash of rocks and sea and splintering timbers. We had two boats, but they were gone by the board more quickly than the thought that turned to them. Every man of the native crew stampeded overside, and we never again saw as much of one of them as a mangled limb or rag of clothing. They were pulped on the rocks and devoured by pirate sharks and sea-birds when the storm went down.

Only Osman's courage in holding a steady helm and piling her on to the rocks nose first saved any of us. Memory is unreliable of moments when death's fingers seem to clutch and his chill breath blows, but I think there were five minutes between the first crash and the last gulp when the broken ship slid back into the waves and disappeared.

Within a minute both masts went overboard, one to either side—and that was sheer Providence. I saw Monty rush to the women's cabin and emerge with a suitcase. Fred brought another. I started to try to save some more of their things, but they and the women struck me, and Monty cursed me for a lunatic.

"Get forward!" he yelled. "The ship's bow's ashore!"

But I went below in the dark and found some pistol ammunition and an overcoat, not ceasing search for other things until the hull slid with a sickening lilt and water arose knee-deep around me. Then I rushed for the deck and carromed into Will with his arms full of blankets.

"Monty's got the women safe!" he shouted in my ear. "These ought to keep 'em warm!"

We went forward together, slipping and scrambling through tangled rigging on the heaving deck. When we reached the bow, there was nobody, nor any sound from shore except the roar of surf on rocks. Fumbling about, I found a rope over the bows and pulled on it. It was loose and came in freely. Then Will yelled in my ear again.

"The mast! It makes a bridge! One end's on land!"

So we hauled the loose rope in—there was not more than fifty or sixty feet of it—and, making it fast again to one of the wooden bollards, clung to it and tried to walk ashore along the mast. I could have done it if Will had not slipped and snatched at me. But with those blankets to encumber him he did the only thing he could to save himself.

We fell one on each side of the mast, holding arms over it while wild surf wrenched at us and pounded our legs on the jutting ledge. In the effort to get back on the mast we broke our grip. Will let go of everything except the blankets but I caught him as he fell.

The surf rolled us over and whirled us round like tops, wrapping three coils of the rope about us both. I gave up then. I heard the ship go scraping, creaking, splintering down off the ledge, and shut my eyes.

Yet I breathed—air, not water. I felt myself turning slowly, like a corpse on a gibbet. Will yelled in my ear and kicked until the wet rope cut into my flesh. I awoke to the fact that the ship had gone down to Davy Jones but not the mast, whose upper end was jammed in a crevice of the rock, and we were hanging like two fish caught on one pole. One more slow turn and we would both have been loose again and down among the dead men in the waves.

I don't remember how we got ashore. We twisted the rope about ourselves again and hung for a time, daring neither to let go nor try experiments. Then it dawned on both of us at once that our united weight, acting like a pendulum as the waves pushed us to and fro, was loosening the mast, and we began to make frantic efforts.

I remember an agony of piercing, bruising rock and the disgusting smother of salt water, and the next I knew I was lying on my back in a low cave with one of Will's blankets under my head and the pistol cartridges out of my pockets spread to dry all about me. It was beginning to be dawn and the sea was raging twenty yards away as if it hoped to climb and seize us in spite of all.

"I guess you're not so dead as you look!" said Will, peering down at my face. "There's sweet water near. I'll fetch you

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some in my folding cup when you say the word. It's all you'll get for breakfast, feller!"

"Where's Monty?" I asked weakly.

"Blessed if I know. Don't know where Gracie is, or any of 'em. I've climbed all over the cliff in the dark, but I didn't find a soul."

"Are they drowned?"

"Search me! Let's hope not!"

The utter, blank hopelessness of the thought that we might be the sole survivors aroused me to a sort of dogged, quarrelsome-defiant mood that served us both, for I staggered up and with that defiance in place of strength set out to supplement Will's search. He followed me and presently shot a great sea-bird with his pistol.

"He'll taste like Standard Oil," he said, "but I've got matches and I'll bet we eat! Keep an eye lifting for driftwood."

The first weak efforts made me vomit, but when I was about empty of salt water I drank like a colt at the rain-water pool Will had found and felt better. Then we went up the cliff-side together, three or four hundred feet, by a track so suspiciously easy that I swore once or twice the grades were no accident.

Will said the smoothing of the rock was due to weather, but I showed him ancient pick-marks that the weather had only half obliterated and indentations where we clambered around a rock-face that bore man's mark as unmistakably as tracks used yesterday.

It was no wonder that he had not found our party or any traces of them in the dark. From the top of the cliff we could see such a toothed and serried maze of treeless rock as recalled more than anything one of those Japanese landscapes where the hills are all but perpendicular and all the narrow valleys run in curves.

As far as the eye could see there was not a patch of level or a dwelling or a stream or anything to rest the eye. Within five yards of us a hundred people could have hidden easily. Ten thousand could have peopled the ravines within a quarter-mile and we have been none the wiser.

We shouted, but all that came back was echoes and the screams of sea-birds. We sat down and searched the sea for traces of the wreck. Beyond that the birds appeared more busy between some waves than others, we detected nothing.

"D'you suppose the natives live in caves?" Will wondered. "Old Osman said something pleasant about their cutting throats. D'you suppose they're cannibals? Say—I'd hate to be eaten in a cave, wouldn't you? Me for the open! Me for a picnic out o' doors!"

"I'm ravenous," I answered. "I'll eat that bird raw unless we find fuel soon!"

So we set out in search again, exposing ourselves against the sky-line as much as possible in order that Monty or any of the others might see us. But no shouts came to announce friends, and after a time we lost all memory of the track back to our cave and wandered uselessly for hours looking for it, until the sun made the blazing rock unbearable and I grew too weak from hunger to go another yard.

Then we plucked what Will was pleased to call the pigeon—gutted him with our fingers and a piece of a sharp rock—gathered tufts of dry grass from places where time and the sea-birds had deposited seed and some dust in which it could germinate—and went through the farce of singeing the oily carcass. It was the most revolting meal I ever ate. Memory of it has power to spoil appetite today.

"Let's listen a while," Will suggested. "If Fred got ashore, it's a cinch he had his concertina along. He'd rather be drowned than lose it! If they're all ashore, they'll be just as badly off as we are and probably mourning for us into the bargain. Fred'll make music to cheer 'em up. Let's listen, and maybe we'll hear him!"

But that forlorn hope bore no fruit either. We sat still under the shade of an overhanging rock with ears alert, until the strain of that added to the previous exhaustion sent me off again, either into sleep or a dead faint. Will said afterward it was sleep, to reassure me, but I doubted him. It was growing dark again when I awoke, and we set out at once in an effort to find our first cave and the blankets and cartridges we left there.

IT WAS a useless effort. We could not even find sweet water again, and when the sun went down in an angry red haze we were glad to take shelter on a ledge, in a place like the hollow of a giant's hand, fifty feet below the summit of a sharp crag that we climbed to try to get a view. Nothing but a bird's-eye view, however,

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would have been the least use. All we got and remembered all night was a picture of jumbled granite, planless and barren—the teeth of chaos carved in gray, imperishable stone.

We were both growing spiritless by that time, reverting to the child's hunger for caresses, as the strongest men do when death looks near and lonely. We sat first back to back and then with an arm about each other, and I suppose Will thought of far-away New England meadows and the tidy, elm-lined streets. I tried to think of London and its good, bold roar—of the clatter of hoofs when the hansom cabs go spinning through the lighted squares—and the din of spoons and dishes behind the swinging doors the waiters come and go through.

But another sound kept breaking in on the reverie—a sound that at first seemed a part of it all, because I suppose we were both too numb mentally to separate the pictures we imagined from the sounds we really heard. But all at once Will sat bolt upright and gripped my leg until I swore at him.

"Did you hear that?" he asked hoarsely.

There was a scream, high pitched and long, like that of a woman undergoing torture. After an interval, during which the whole earth seemed to pause and listen, there came another one.

"D'you suppose that's Gracie?" asked Will. "D'you suppose some darned natives have caught her and——"

"No," I said, "Gracie's voice is different. I heard her scream once—more like a boy."

"Alice Ellis, then!"

"No," I said. "Mrs. Ellis couldn't scream so loud."

"Nobody could tell how loud she'd scream until there was excuse for it," he answered.

Then we heard it again and it made the blood run cold. I thought there was grief in it as well as pain, but pain was uppermost. I wasn't sure it was a woman's cry.

"Was it Fred's concertina, d'you suppose?" Will hazarded. "Fred's always up to tricks."

"Don't be an ass," I said. "Could it be a wild animal?"

"What sort?"

"How should I know?"

The cry was repeated—surely a woman's, we both thought, full of agony and hopelessness, finishing crescendo as if the pain increased.

"I can't sit here!" said Will. "I can't stand it! That may be Gracie or Alice Ellis. Either of them would take a chance in the dark for either of us!"

That was true. Yet I did not see how the truth of it would help us find footing in uncharted blackness. We both had pistols, so that the danger of attack by animal or human was one we need not hesitate about. But we had both seen the landscape from the top of the crag at sundown.

"Did you ever hunt for needles in the hay?" I said. "Let's try for the top of the crag again and sit and watch a while."

He agreed to that, and by dint of striking more of his precious matches than was wise and by feeling out every hand and foothold, we gained the summit, tired and breathless. Just as we reached the top the scream pierced the darkness again, louder and shriller than ever, and we lay side by side, shuddering, staring downward into blue gloom out of which the shadows of a hundred other summits gradually grew and formed a solid ring around us.

"Might as well look for ice in hell!" said Will. "Look up—there's stars. Look down—there's night. We couldn't see an army down there!"

"Hsssh!" said I. "Look! Listen!"

I had seen a spark. It might have been imagination that suggested the woodpecker tapping of flint on steel.

"Which direction?"

I did not answer. We both lay still as mice and my eyes ached with trying to pierce the dark. Then—and it may again have been imagination—I thought I heard once more the tap-tap-tapping of a flint. Sound carries unaccountably. A moment later we both saw several sparks. Then a little blue flame. The blue flame grew—grew redder—and bent away before the unsteady puffs of some one blowing with his mouth. There was not a doubt of it.

"Shall I shout?" Will whispered.

"No," I said. "Mark the bearings carefully, and then let's stalk him. He or she, if it's a member of our crowd, well and good. If not, let's take precautions. It might be Osman bin Omar," I suggested, "imagining himself sole survivor and mourning his little ship!"

"Gee!" said Will. "I never thought of

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that! If he has a pistol—and that may be—and we came on him too suddenly, he'd shoot! But I don't believe Osman could scream like a woman."

"Osman was a strange old scout," said I. "How about bearings? Have you got them? Come on, then."

If the climb up had been difficult the descent into blackness was a thousand times worse. Luckily there were not very many loose stones and we made no noise that would alarm a person not deliberately listening for us; but I twisted an ankle rather badly and Will fell twice and bruised himself so that he could hardly bear to touch knees or elbows. And that was before we had reached the foot of the crag with which we were already to some extent familiar.

Once at the foot of that we groped our way into the sheer unknown, not daring to strike matches or to speak or to take one step without first stooping and feeling the way along. Though we rounded our crag at once we could see no sign of the fire; there were other, rather lower saw-tooth ridges between it and us.

But from time to time the agonizing cry came over to us, to make us sure that someone lonelier and more wretched than we ourselves was still bivouacking near.

Far from growing used to the tortured voice, we grew more and more afraid of it. Each interval between the cries was torture of drawn-out anticipation that was only rendered more acute when the cry did come.

Whoever it was had more fuel than we had been able to find, for as we crawled along the bottom of a fissure between high granite walls we saw the glow of a good-sized fire reflected on the darkness above the next ridge in front of us. With that glow to give us direction the last part of the stalk bade fair to be the easiest.

But when we came to climb the ridge we found it all but straight up-and-down, without a cranny that we could find to drive fingers into. We had to make another dark circuit of perhaps a quarter of a mile and come up from the far side over a broken ramp that cut our knees and bruised my feet through the shoe-soles.

We lay at last side by side again in a niche on the sky-line, fifty feet above and a hundred and fifty feet away from a big square granite rock, like a pagan high altar, that stood bold and lonely in the midst of a nearly level space within the circumference of saw-tooth crags. The fire was on top of that rock, in the midst of it not such a very big fire after all, but burning bright because of the sea salt in the driftwood it was made of.

THE person who had built the fire stood by it, erect against the night, motionless, betrayed by the hot flame as distinctly as if by sunlight.

She was a woman—rather young—not very dark-skinned, as far as we could judge by firelight—almost entirely naked but with jewels on her neck and fingers that I could see from where we lay. One great gem in a ring on her right hand sparkled in the firelight as if it were the source of light itself.

She seemed to be standing in an attitude of prayer; but prayer was not bringing her much consolation, for while we watched she threw her head back and sent her wild, weird grief-cry echoing among the crags.

"If she does that again I'll yell too!" Will whispered. "You see if I don't! There are some things a feller can stand about just so much of!"

The moon got up at last over a ring of rock wall and bathed her in lemon light. She looked at it for several minutes and then struck her breast defiantly—the most magnificently contemptuous, cruel gesture I ever saw. Then she cried again, but Will kept command of himself, although I felt him shivering as violently as I did.

She looked rather like an African woman, only taller than the ordinary—clean-limbed and supple like a Galla, but with longer hair. The hair looked thick and reached to her shoulders, being cut off at that length evenly. I guessed her to be of mixed Asian and African descent, probably of good, proud blood on either side.

Presently, as she turned away from the moon, I saw that her upper right arm was bandaged tightly. It looked badly swollen under the rags, and one or two gestures she made toward the bandage with her other hand suggested that she was in acute pain.

"Will!" I whispered. "What'll you bet me her clothes haven't all been used up for bandages?"

"What'll you bet me she isn't shipwrecked like ourselves?" he answered.

"She seems in no fear of being seen," said I.

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"It begins to look bad to me," said Will. "If she has been wandering about, why hasn't she come across Monty and the rest of our crowd? If they're alive, she'd either be with them by now or else afraid of being seen by them, you'd think."

"I suppose if we discover ourselves she'll run?"

"Maybe," he answered. "Yet we've got to do something. If she's wounded, at least we can give her a shirt to make bandages of. Which shall we do—call to her from here or try to go closer before she sees us?"

The question was answered for us by the woman herself. Her keen ears caught the sibilant note that makes human whispering the least secret of all communications—even a shout blends better with the natural sounds. She glanced swiftly once in our direction, with the enviable gift, denied to men from towns, of locating sound unerringly, and was gone with a leap like a leopard's, springing down from the altar rock and vanishing in shadow.

We clambered and slid clumsily down into the level place and hunted for her like idiots, probing the shadows and calling in what we imagined were reassuring tones. At last Will saw the folly of that proceeding and called me off. We both went and sat on the altar rock in the fire-light and I put my hand on something sticky. I held my hand to the fire to examine it.

"Will," I said, "that woman left a little pool of blood behind!"

He came and examined it.

"Splashes!" he said. "See—and here. There's another where she jumped from the rock—it's wet. We can track her."

"Let's try to find the blankets first and take her one," said I. "If she's wounded as badly as that we can afford to give her a long start. Let's wai for morning and hunt first for our cave."

"Look for food now!" said Will. "Didn't she mean to cook something at the fire? Perhaps she dropped it before she ran."

But we hunted in vain.

Whatever her purpose in building a fire on that square rock, cooking had not been included in it.

"D'you suppose she was making a signal?" said Will.

"To whom?" I objected. "Why should she signal and then run the minute she heard a whisper?"

"Why should she build a fire and yell and yell and yell—and then run at the first whisper, if not because she was hoping to decoy an enemy?" he retorted.

"In that case," I said, "we'd better look out for the enemy, too!"

He was sitting on the edge of the square rock, clearly outlined by the blazing fire. I was in shadow below him. He got down and sat beside me and had scarcely done so when a lump of granite whizzed in a parabola past where his head had been and broke in pieces on the rock.

"She's less than twenty yards away," I said.

The stone was too big for any one to have thrown it much farther than that.

We listened intently and heard the sound of bare feet retreating swiftly.

"She crept close and hurled it and ran!"

"I guess she saw only me," Will hazarded.

"And mistook you for some one else."

"D'you suppose," he said, "that the stone arrived soon enough after I ducked for the person who threw it to think I was hit?"

"You may have saved some one's life," I answered. "If she thinks she hit you, the person she wanted may escape."

"Maybe it wasn't she who tossed the rock!" he said suddenly. "Maybe it was some one gunning for her! Say—if I'm sitting all hunched up on the edge of this rock in the fire- and moonlight, could you or any one mistake me for a woman without clothes on?"

"From some angles you'd look just like some one's shadow," I answered.

But we abandoned that theory, because surely an enemy who imagined he was pelting the woman would have continued throwing and then have come closer to investigate. We lay in the shadow until nearly dawn, but no one came and no other sound broke the stillness. I think Will slept for a short time, but he denied it indignantly and swore he had been puzzling out the problem.

"My final guess," he said, "is that the woman threw that rock at me, mistaking me for some one else; that she knows she missed; that she was afraid of reprisals and ran; and that she's on the watch now like a mountain goat."

I did not agree with him. His denial of having fallen asleep annoyed me and I would not have agreed with him whatever he said. But his guess turned out accurate.

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erhaps he got the clue to the puzzle in his reams.

WHEN dawn did come at last, we found the path to the cave and the cave itself far more easily than we pected. The surf was still raging among ie rocks and we stood and watched it for a ttle while for wreckage or dead bodies. ut suddenly Will made an exclamation hat brought me hurrying into the cave.

"There were three blankets!" he said.

One was left. The one my head had ested on was still folded in the same place.

"How many cartridges did you have loose n your pockets?" he asked.

I did not know.

"I left them spread all about the floor of he cave in twos and threes and sixes. Look!"

Some one had gathered them all together, s if meaning to carry them off, and had hen thought better of it, for they lay in a eap in one place.

"And here's blood!" said Will.

If it was the woman—and we did not loubt it—she had rested for a while with her back against the rock wall, for there was a blood-smear exactly where the bandage on her right arm would have touched. There was a great splash of blood, too, on the threshold of the cave, scarcely yet dry, as if she had left the place in a hurry when she heard our approach.

We were growing famished and first we went to the water-hole to drink. She had been there ahead of us. The water was tinged where she had washed her wound.

"Maybe I'll drink here about this time tomorrow," said Will, "provided we find no other drinking-hole meanwhile!"

I feeling the same about it, we chose small slips of granite to suck and took up the trail there and then, not troubling very much about concealment, because we argued that in spite of increasing hunger our strength must be greater than hers with that wound, and pursuit would wear her down.

"She has a mate somewhere," I said. "Else why did she take two blankets?"

"A man would have taken all three," said Will. "She took what she needed. I'll bet you she's wearing 'em both! Come on —I see the way she went—look! Quick, man! There goes the tail end of a blanket over that ridge!"

She was going like the wind and we hunted her like clodhoppers, stumbling and clattering over rocks that she took in her stride. But washing her wound had not stanched the bleeding, nor did the blankets altogether soak up the flow, for we kept finding crimson traces that made it comparatively easy to follow her line, although we did not catch sight of her again.

We had overestimated our strength and underrated hers. At the end of an hour we lay panting, with swimming eyes, and tried to nerve ourselves to climb a hillside that was already glimmering in heat strong enough to cook by and that owned as far as eye could measure not one level plane to stand on.

At it we went, after a five minute respite; and after twenty minutes of sickening effort we lay down again, with a view beneath us of almost all the island. One thing and one only gladdened our eyes—water, sweet, splashing, unmistakable, cascading from a split crag half a mile in front.

With that sole exception—for we could not yet see the solitary tree that flourished with its roots deep down in crevices into which the water had carried infinitely tiny particles of food for it for centuries—the whole panorama was one of hideous battlements—naked, hot rocks, blue in the sunlight—raw, grim valleys leading nowhere, looking like the scars left by fighting Titans—and all around in dim, hazy obscurity, the merciless sea. Away in the distance to the right, through a gap between two horrid crags, we could see surf plunging sky-high.

"If Barabbas ever lived in this place," Will murmured, "jail must have looked like heaven to him! Even a Jerusalem jail!"

There was only one way the woman could have taken—along a narrow ridge like the working edge of a twisted saw that led to another pile of granite lumps like the one we lay on. But we had given up the thought of chasing her. The sight of water falling like a spray of diamonds drove every other consideration out of mind. The one remaining thing worth while was to lie and gather strength to reach the precious stuff.

But we were weaker than we knew. Reaction at the sight of what we needed sickened us, and for an hour it would have been impossible to crawl a dozen yards. So we lay and cursed the sun that beat down on our backs, turning this and that

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way like tortured martyrs on a grid, only swearing as the martyrs are said never to have done.

There was not a square foot of shadow within reach. Every boulder seemed to be either a wedge or a cone with its smallest angle uppermost. The crevices, all open to the sun, took in the heat, redoubled it and cast it forth again to tremble and shimmer in hot tides.

"So this is hell!" said Will, trying to force humor where there was none, and failing bravely. The remark was too true to draw a smile.

"There's another man in it!" said I after a short while. "D'you suppose that's the devil walking up the valley?"

The heat played tricks with our eyes, so that we could see pretty clearly one minute and not at all the next. But the new excitement had the effect of banishing fatigue. First one of us, then the other, made out the figure of a man clad in khaki, with a battered green helmet, and a rifle slung behind his shoulder, walking pretty leisurely along the ravine below us in our direction.

He disappeared at intervals behind tumbled rocks but was taking no precautions to conceal himself. Every now and then we could hear his foot-fall as distinctly as a hammer-stroke.

WE COULD see he was a ragged-bearded man; but that was to be expected in such a place. He was broad-shouldered, too, and powerfully built, although to judge his height from that angle was impossible. There were a dozen or more dark blots within sight that looked like cave-mouths, out of any one of which he might have come; but he was leaving the cascade of water behind him and his object was simply unguessable in walking in that heat along a comfortless ravine-bottom leading nowhere.

"Shout to him!" said I, for my own throat was too parched.

For one wild moment I thought he was Fred. Then I remembered that all the rifles must have gone down with the ship and that Fred's neat beard could not have grown to that length in two days. Will shook his head.

"Remember the woman!" he said. "She was afraid of some one. Some one wounded her!"

Then, for the first time since we reached that dreadful place, there flashed across my memory the story the mandarin had told at Bill's. This might be Prof. Grogan Guthrie, still here in spite of his cablegram. Or it might be the German professor, said to have inoculated young Charles Dent against disease—the strange disease that killed him.

And while we watched and wondered just what was best to do it became evident that some one else saw the man. A rock as big as the one that had missed Will so narrowly went hurtling out from behind a boulder on the side of the ravine and broke in pieces just behind him.

He had his rifle free in a second and sent a bullet back by way of answer. I caught a momentary glimpse of one of our stolen blankets fluttering. So did he, for he sent three shots straight at it. And then we heard again that hideous, grief-laden cry that had made our marrow creep in the night. In the silence that followed it we heard the man laugh. The blanket fluttered again, and again he fired at it.

"Here's where I interfere!" said Will.

"She attacked first," said I; not that I really believed that, but I wanted to gain time and think.

"Maybe she had cause," he answered.

"She pelted us with a rock that would have killed a bullock," I argued. "You saw her pelt him. I don't see what claim she has on our help."

I would not have said that if I had believed for a second that Will would listen to it; but I had a sort of delirious idea that time was the thing to gain—time—time.

"I'll not see murder done," he answered. "He'll have to let me try the case if he wants my leave to shoot that woman. Hey there! Hello there! Below there! Hey!"

The man with the rifle jumped as if something had hit him and Will stood up to let him see who challenged.

"Cover him with your pistol!" he said. "He's almost out of range, but fire if he fires at me!"

The man drew a bead on Will so suddenly and fired so instantly that the bullet struck the rock between us sooner than Will could duck. My own answering pistol bullet went utterly wild but the noise of it brought him to his senses. He set the butt of his rifle down and waved his hand.

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Instantly then, in proof that the woman was still on the war-path and not so injured that she could not seize swift advantage, another lump of rock went whizzing down at him, and he only jumped away in the nick of time to avoid it. He raised his rifle to reply.

"Stop that!" Will roared. "Fire, and I fire on you!"

The man put up his rifle again. Promptly another stone came spinning down at him, heavier and as accurately aimed. That was too much for him. He fired three answering shots. Promptly Will made good his own threat and fired twice with his pistol, coming so near the target that I saw a chip fly within two feet of the man. So he lowered the butt of the rifle again and shouted something gutturally that we could not catch.

Plainly the woman was in no mood for any armistice. Her ammunition was limitless. She began to rain down rocks on him so fast and with such sure aim that he had to dodge incessantly.

"Run for cover, you fool!" yelled Will, standing up again. "Come up here out of reach! If you fire at her I'll shoot you sure as ——!"

Whether the man understood all that or not, he did start to clamber up the difficult slope toward us; and the first few yards put so many boulders between him and the woman that he was out of her range. But then he changed his mind suddenly, turned and ran back the way he had come, she getting in four more shots at him as he passed her.

"Will you bet with me which is the guilty one?" asked Will.

VI

PURSUIT of neither the man nor the woman tempted us one particle. Our one obsession was the water cascading half-a-mile away and we climbed down toward it, reckless of having made enough noise with our pistols to draw the attention of all the inhabitants the island might contain.

The man with the rifle might turn on his tracks and stalk the pair of us for all we cared. Our tongues were swelling. Sight of the water in the distance robbed us of all desire except that one, to drink. Death would have been a cheap price to pay for it.

I remembered, as we scrambled down-hill and stumbled along the bottom of the boulder-strewn ravine, that every one who had mentioned Barabbas Island had mentioned fierce inhabitants. A sort of fatalistic resignation settled on me, born of the thought that Grace Vandam and Monty and the rest of our party had been murdered. I supposed our turn was next and did not care, provided I could reach the water and die wet, not parched.

So we heard nothing except the music of the sparkling, tumbling stream that was too far away to be heard really, and the way to it seemed down a very valley of fire, growing longer instead of shorter as we hurried. We each fell a dozen times, tearing our clothes and bruising ourselves so badly that later, when we had drunk and sanity returned, each thought the other had been fighting.

When we reached it at last we were like men in a dream, but we had learned enough self-control, adventuring up and down the earth, not to drink too deeply even in that first frenzy of quenching thirst; so that within ten minutes of the touch of water to our lips we were ourselves again, weak from hunger now, but masters of our own free will and able to laugh at the scarecrow figure each cut.

Then we saw the tree and our tired eyes yearned to it. It was the only spot of green, the only touch of friendliness and peace, in all that island—a great, gnarled monstrous thing, with roots like prehistoric Titan snakes and only a few dull olive leaves among the twisted black branches. It bore fruit, though, and we walked unsteadily nearer to discover what kind, rubbing sun-tortured eyes and refusing to believe them.

The tree stood in the midst of a cup-like amphitheater about three hundred yards across and we came right under it before we yielded to the evidence and knew those bleached, awkwardly poised things on the up-turned ends of branches were human skulls. But there was no doubt of it then, for the rocks underneath were littered with human bones and other broken skulls that had fallen like apples in a windblow.

"Where did all these guys live?" demanded Will.

"Caves," I suggested.

"They can't have killed one another and

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hung one another's bones to dry! Where are the murderers?"

"That's easy!" I said. "Where would you and I be if we had overcome our enemies on such an island? We'd be gone as fast as boats could take us! Nobody could live here permanently. What could they eat?"

"That's easier," he answered. "Fish. See the bones. There has been a regular shore lunch under the tree, either before the murder fest or else by way of celebration afterward! Look — clam-shells — shark bones—all kinds o' fish-bones—and here are date-stones—lots of 'em scattered all over the place. Dates, fish and water—an islander in these parts would thrive on that diet. Dates are imported, of course. We've no proof whatever that the people have gone."

I squinted up at the skulls on the tree and took leave to doubt that. Circumstantial proof can never hold a candle to intuition; I could not escape from the thought that the fish had been eaten by the owners of those skulls before they died.

"There's a rib-bone here," I said, "with a bullet mushroomed on it from the inside! It must have passed clear through the body and broken the far rib before it stopped."

Then Will found another flattened piece of lead between two fractured vertebræ and I found a skull with a hole in it and a mushroom of lead inside.

"Whoever did the job comes here to drink," said Will. "Stands to reason he must if he's on the island. Even if there are other springs, or rain pools, sooner or later he'll come here. If I weren't so all-fired hungry I'd wait."

"No need to wait long," I answered. "Duck, man—quick! Here comes a native!"

The easiest thing to do anywhere on that island was to hide at a moment's notice. We dropped where we stood between the rocks and tree-roots, within twenty feet of a shallow hollow where the water from the cascade formed a pool between us and the man who was coming warily toward us. It was a marvel that he had not seen us, but by good luck the trunk of the tree had partly concealed us and his own fear did the rest, for he looked behind him oftener than before.

It seemed to me there was something familiar about him, but eyesight was playing strange tricks that day. He had a pan in his hands, and when he struck it inadvertently against a rock he jumped at the sound as if frightened out of his senses. For a minute after that he stood stock still, facing back the way he came, as if in two minds whether to return empty-handed or go forward.

At last, however, he recovered courage and came and dipped up water, washing the pan pretty carefully and then himself. Then he prayed, going through all the Moslem ritual, and after that he filled the pan again and started back with it, balancing it carefully.

"Osman!" Will called after him then. "Oh, Osman bin Omar!"

It was certainly he, and equally certainly the pan was something he had never brought ashore with him. But the sound of a friend's voice had the opposite effect to that intended. He spilt the water and ran for dear life, glancing back in terror over his shoulder and running the harder when he saw us standing erect among the tree roots.

"He fancies we're ghosts," said I.

"So we shall be, unless we eat soon!" Will answered. "That old rascal has had a bellyfull. He'll show me where he got it or I'll know why! Come on!"

So we left the tree with its gruesome fruit behind us and set off in pursuit, reckless again of the man with the rifle or the woman with her well-aimed lumps of rock. And because appetite was whip and spur and thirst no longer made us imbecile, we kept him in view and were hard on his heels when he dodged down a narrow defile and disappeared.

WE WENT down the defile after him like terriers after a rat—up over a jumble of rocks where we heard his metal pan banging—and brought up short at a small, dark cave-mouth that nobody less than a madman would have dared charge into without first taking precautions. The opening was less than half a man's height and the entrance sloped at an angle of forty-five.

But we made sure there was another opening somewhere, because it was not quite dark inside; and when we withdrew a little way and looked up we saw smoke coming in a very thin column from a crevice. We had started to climb to investigate that, when I heard voices.

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So Will kept watch with his pistol cocked nd pointed, while I crouched beside the nouth of the cave to listen.

"They're talking English!" I whispered resently.

And then neither he nor I could hold urselves in a second longer. We both elled together:

"Monty! Oh, Monty! Fred, you old kate, come out and show yourself! Good ord, Didums—come out and show us where ome food is! Hey, below there! Come ut! Come out!"

But there was no answer, and when I istened again I could hear nothing. After we had waited a minute or two Will chose a good-sized stone and hurled it through the opening, only to discover that the passage turned sharply ten or twelve feet down, presenting a blank wall to bullets, stones or any other missiles.

"All right!" he said. "What shields them shields me. I'm going down!"

I tried to dissuade him, for that was sheer recklessness, but he shook my hand off.

"I tell you I'm going to eat real eats within the hour or pick a fight!" he answered. "I'm in no waiting mood!"

Nor was he in a mood to take things leisurely. He went through that opening feet first with a run and a jump, and I heard his feet strike hard against the rock where the passage turned. I could think of nothing whatever for me to do but to follow him, but I lacked his skill in sliding bases and in similar imitations of the elusive eel that boys learn at school in America; he was out of sight before my own heels hit the rock more gently.

When I entered the cave, which was really not dark inside at all, he was sitting on Osman bin Omar. Another man, whom I did not know from Adam, was sitting up on a bed of dried seaweed, staring in speechless fear.

Light came in from three directions. The roof of the cave appeared to be formed by two enormous rocks caught together in the jaws of a hole. The chinks between the rocks served for light and air holes, although not nearly so efficiently for letting out the smoke, clouds of which coiled round and round and made my eyes smart.

There was a pretty big pile of driftwood in a corner, but the fire was of economical proportions, laid on a flat stone in the middle of the cave.

The only other furniture noticeable at first was a numerous collection of empty tin cans in the corner opposite the driftwood-pile, which gave the cave an air of dump-heap melancholy. Both Will and I stared at the empty cans with sour distaste. Something about our appearance seemed to reassure the man on the seaweed bed at last.

"I have to keep a fire smoking, you see, or they would bring too many flies," he said apologetically in a weak voice. "Yet I am always in fear that he will see the smoke."

"Why not throw them outside, then?" suggested Will, getting off Osman at last.

"Because then he would see the cans and that would be certainly fatal! Since he captured my rifle my one hope lies in concealment. How did you discover me?"

Osman answered that question.

"I go for water. You —— fool sending me in —— daylight! —— man see me! Running —— fast, but he catch!"

The old sea-rover did not seem to bear the least resentment on account of Will's rough handling, although he could scarcely breathe yet.

"Where are the others?" Will asked him. "Where are Miss Vandam—Mrs. Ellis—Lord Montdidier—Mr. Oakes—and the five sailors?"

"Damfiknowathing!" answered Osman, especially adept at concertina words when he wanted to express the unlimited negative.

The man on the seaweed bed forced himself on to his knees with a motion of extreme excitement. His hair was long and his beard so straggly and ill-kempt that he resembled a scarecrow. His clothes bore out the resemblance. Our beards, too, had a few days' growth and our clothes were torn, but we were immaculate dudes compared to him.

"Do you mean to tell me you are of that party?" he demanded. "Do you mean to tell me you came here on the yacht, in spite of the cablegram I received about you from Cape Town?"

"Who are you?" demanded Will, by way of retort courteous.

"My name is Prof. Grogan Guthrie!"

Will whistled.

"Is the yacht wrecked?" demanded Guthrie.

"Not that I know of," Will answered. "But your larder will be, professor, unless I

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and my friend here eat eats right soon! We're famishing!"

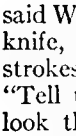
"You'll find food under that flat stone," said Guthrie.

We both hurried at once to lift it. Underneath was a coffin-shaped space, rather shallow and narrow, but long, very nearly filled with cans of soup and bully beef and jam and all the other makeshifts for a square meal that travelers have to digest. There was a kettle in there, too, and we took two cans of soup because we could prepare that quickest.

"Ah—er—I hope you appreciate—ah—I—er—carried all that stuff two or three at a time on hands and knees! You—ah—distinctly owe your dinner to—ah—my patience and resource!"

"Obligation placed on record hereby," said Will, opening both cans with his pocket-knife, cutting the metal in quick, firm strokes toward him, as whittlers cut wood. "Tell us about yourself, prof. You don't look thrifty!"

He emptied both cans into the kettle and a wondrous savory smell that was able to suggest white napkins, silver cutlery, music and all the trimmings began to pervade the cave. Personally, I wished he would not invite the man to talk about himself until the infinitely more important food had been discussed. But Will seemed to take delight in tantalizing both himself and me.



"ABOUT myself?" said Guthrie. "Ah—well—you see—it is obvious—I am sick. I doubt my chance of recovery. I have a disease. I permitted that blackguard German to inoculate me. This man—you say his name is Osman?—wandering about in search of water, so he said, discovered me in a fainting condition by the tree where the skulls are, near the—ah—waterfall. We made a bargain there and then. He brings the water. I feed him while the food lasts. Judging by his appetite, it will not last very long! He—ah—assisted me to reach the cave again and I—ah—very much doubt that I shall—ah—ever leave it! The disease has hold of me. In time I shall fall apart!"

"You're cheerful, aren't you!" Will murmured, stirring the soup with the blade of his pocket-knife and secretly enjoying my impatience.

"No, my friend, I am the reverse of cheerful."

"You don't mean it!" said Will. "Tell us about the German?"

"Curse him! What can I tell of him? Who would believe?"

"I'm not one of those incredulous guys," said Will. "I can believe 'most anything of a German, professor. S'pose you out with it?"

"Suppose you out with that soup," said I. "It's hot enough!"

There seemed to be no plates, but Will had his folding drinking-cup and we took turn about with that, the professor talking while we ate.

"If I were well," he said, "I would never yield to you—never! The secret of this island is rightly mine. You have no business here. If the rest of your party has come to grief trying to make a surreptitious visit without my permission, I am not sorry for them! It serves them right! Understand that, please—first, last, and all the time!"

"Memo made of it," said Will, swallowing hot soup.

"The Chinaman in Alexandria—Hi Ying Lang is his rapscallion name, the yellow rascal!—gave the secret first of all to me, and mine it is! This German devil Schindler was here first, but he is an outrageous criminal and beneath consideration morally, although a legion in himself when it comes to ousting him, as I daresay you will find! Such a conscienceless hellion as he has no rights of any kind—unless death by the shortest route is a right. If you kill him you will earn my gratitude. Unless you kill him he will kill you!"

"Some one else might get him first," suggested Will, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"No!" said Guthrie, his eyes blazing. "No, no, no! He has killed every one else! He has killed all the islanders!"

"I know of one he hasn't got yet," Will answered.

"Eh? Eh? You mean to say that wretched woman is still on the prowl? Eh? How does she do it? How in the lord's name does she do it? She was wife of the chief of the island. Most of them he inoculated with his serum. All those died. He told them—as he told me and poor Charles Dent before me—that the serum would protect them against the low malaria that haunts the place. Those who would not take his serum he set against one another,

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causing a sort of civil war. Whenever either side could catch a prisoner or kill a man, they set his head on the tree. There's only one tree on the island. They worship it in some pagan fashion. Both sides used it to hang trophies on, going there in the night so that the enemy could see the new horror at break of day. Sometimes both sides would hang up a new head during the same night. In that way more than fifty islanders met their death."

"How many were there to start with?" I asked.

"I am not sure. I think the population varied. I think there was a lot of travel to and fro, especially to get wives from the mainland, until the island got such a bad name."

"Who gave it a bad name?"

"He did—Schindler! He intended that immigration should stop until he could get his schemes developed. If you've done with that kettle, please give it to the man you call Osman to take away and wash before it attracts the ants; they came and drove me out of the cave once and I can't afford to be rendered homeless in my condition!"

Will gave the kettle to Osman, who went outside with it. Then he put the empty soup can in the flames to burn out all traces of anything ants could eat. Grogan Guthrie cleared his throat. Although he obviously resented our being there he seemed to appreciate the luxury of unbosoming his story.

"When I came there were less than a hundred islanders, though there had been many more."

"For the land's sake, where did they live?" demanded Will.

"In caves. Caves like this one, and better than this. There are many. The less-than-a-hundred remaining islanders were troublesome. I came in a sailing-boat and landed with six men. Schindler pretended to welcome me, saying I could help him with the native problem. We lived in a large cave together. One of my men became sick very soon. He said something bit him in the night, and he certainly had a nasty place on his arm, but Schindler said it was the malaria and persuaded me to be inoculated. I have never been well since. It was quite a while before the poison he put into me really took hold, but I felt ill from the first, and he watched me with the delight of a connoisseur. Oh, that man is a fiend incarnate!"

"Where did he get his serum from?" I asked.

"God knows! I have suspected him of preparing it on the island from the carcases of fish. It was shortly after I came that he brought about the civil war among the islanders who refused to be inoculated. I rather approved at first. The islanders were a fierce and implacable breed, extremely proud, wholly without gratitude and prone to treachery. I thought of the ancient Roman maxim—*divide et impera.* But when I saw how he played fast and loose, first with one side and then the other, I remonstrated. I told him a white man can't play the dark man's game and still claim the white man's privileges."

"How did he take the advice?"

"I WILL tell. He pretended to see the point. He pretended to agree with me and to be mortified by his own impropriety. He promised to make peace between the contending parties. That woman—then the chief's wife—was the intermediary. I don't know I'm sure what she thought she saw in him, but the fact is that there was an affair between them of which the chief knew nothing.

"She used to come and see him in the dead of night, and one night he persuaded her to talk her husband into calling a meeting between both parties for the purpose of eating a banquet of fish under the tree—the time-honored way of cementing an agreement.

"Negotiations took a day or two. At last a day was agreed on. Both sides caught enormous quantities of fish, and carried them to the tree. And if I told you what took place there you would not believe me."

"If I don't I'll tell you," said Will, "so go ahead!"

"It doesn't matter whether or not you believe me! I shall be—ah—going soon to a Tribunal where truth is sifted from the lies. I prefer to tell, but it doesn't in the least matter whether you believe. This happened: that cursed villain Schindler stole my two guns and my pistol, with the ammunition. He loaded them, and loaded his own, and went and hid in a place where he had command of all the space around the tree.

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"With my two guns and his three, and the two pistols, I have calculated that he had fifty shots ready to fire without reloading. He had more cartridges in their clips where he could reach them instantly. And he is what you call a dead shot. That is to say, he never misses at close range when the light is good."

"I've seen him miss," said Will. "He missed me for one."

"Ah! That may be, of course. Let us hope his nerve is going. He missed nothing on that day, though. He did not shoot them all, of course, for some ran, but most of them were so taken by surprize that they stood up to be slain! I did not see it. I was ill. But he came back and told me a wild story about their attacking him, and his brave fight in self-defense. I might have believed it, but one of my four fellows —an Egyptian *fellah*—a great good-natured oaf—came in and told me the truth. He overheard and promptly shot the man. Then he shot my three remaining servants and I think he would have shot me if he had not been so sure that I was dying. He preferred to see me die by disease."

"How long ago was that?" asked Will.

"About three weeks. He took to hunting the men and women who had escaped him, driving them up into the higher crags like goats and potting them at long range. They used to throw rocks at him. Once the woman came in the night, pretending to resume the old relation, and tried to murder him. Her scream when he awoke in time and turned on her is something I shall never forget. He told me next evening that he had wounded her at long range and that he expected her to die from loss of blood. But I have seen her once or twice since then myself."

"What were you doing all this time?" I asked.

"Living in the same cave with him. I did not dare pull out before I was ready. I needed to provision this cave, and I made use of the hours when he was hunting to crawl here with the canned food, and that kettle, and this seaweed for my bed. Ever since I came to the island he had been living off my provisions."

"Why on earth——"

"I will tell that too. He has discovered the secret of this island. There is a cave with God knows what in it—probably wealth enough to satisfy the dreams even of his avarice, to say nothing of antiquities too precious to imagine. He stored his own provisions in that cave long ago. When I came he was afraid to visit the cave, even in the dead of night, lest I or my men follow him and learn the secret.

"So he had to tell me a cock-and-bull story about a relief ship he expects before long. He expects no relief ship. His purpose is to make himself sole possessor of the secret and then to exploit it. I don't doubt he feels now that he has murdered so many people that he must finish the gruesome business before he dares to take the next step!"

"Did you contrive to remove all the provisions?" I asked.

„No. How could I? Unless I had left a lot of cans carefully arranged so as to make a good showing he would have suspected instantly and that would have been the end of me! On the last day I loaded myself almost to the breaking point, but I left behind even then sufficient to keep him in three meals a day for a number of days. Unless he has been very careful with the food—and that would not be like him; he is wasteful of whatever is not his—he should be very short by this time. About now he should begin to be thinking of his own hidden supplies. But I don't think he will visit them, unless absolutely obliged, before he believes me dead.

"He has been stalking me of late. He nearly got me one day when I went to drink. We played puss-in-the-corner among the rocks all the rest of that afternoon and evening. I dared return here only after dark, nearly dead with exhaustion. I was beginning to lose heart when this man Osman came and assured me he was sole survivor of a shipwreck. I named him Joe and let him go for water after that! Believe me, I was glad to have him!"

Will sat still for a long time, scratching with his finger in the ashes on the cave floor. Grogan Guthrie, apparently exhausted, dropped back on the seaweed and lay still. Osman bin Omar came back with the washed-out kettle and a look of having been fearfully afraid again. At last Will delivered judgment.

"Well," he said, "I'm not going to believe your unsupported word. I don't like you. You've acted like a pig from the first about

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this hell-hole of an island. You'd be welcome to it for all of me, but I've got friends and I don't believe they're dead yet. Now —supposing what you say is all true—supposing I should meet up with this German professor guy, and him and me differed, and he 'et' crow—what about the cave with the treasure and the antiquities? Whose d'you claim they'd be?"

Grogan Guthries sat up again and blinked. He seemed no less inclined than Will to side-step that issue.

"I do not—ah—see," he said, "that any set of circumstances could be held to change your condition. You are robbers! You have no earthly right here! I am not in a position to prevent you, that is all!"

WILL'S stare and attitude betrayed interest devoid of all irritation or resentment.

"Tell us your private opinion," he said, "of the man who sent a lying cablegram to Cape Town."

"Meaning me?" suggested Guthrie. "I sent no cablegram at all."

"Who did, then?"

"I suspect my lawyer had some communication with you. I told the man to take any step likely to balk your intentions."

"And you think that what he did does not reflect on you?"

"Certainly not! Any step was legitimate in dealing with men who refused to respect my prior claims. What law could I appeal to? There are no courts here. I had tried appealing to Lord Montdidier's sense of honor but discovered that was altogether lacking. So I instructed my lawyer to find some way of checkmating you. I imagine he sent you a cablegram. I saw the untruthful reply to it."

Will rested his chin between both hands and thought.

"You can't horsewhip a man as sick as he is," I said.

"Horsewhip him?" he answered. "Can't we save him alive and take him a tour through the States in vaudeville? I'd like my country to know what humor is! Osman," he continued, "will you wait here and watch this heavenly-minded gent until we two come back? He'll bear watching mighty close, mind! If he leaves the cave, follow him. I'd like an exact account of every move he makes."

"All right," answered Osman. "Keep —— eye peel."

With that highly satisfactory arrangement made to guard our rear we wasted no further time but crawled out of the low opening and set off in search of traces of our friends. We felt enormously better after the soup; but strangely enough the taste of physical ease, small though it had been, had increased our dread of the outer savagery. The heat and glare seemed to smite us more than ever and the bruises we had won in scrambling over rocks reasserted themselves until the torture was almost unbearable.

Will conceived the idea that a cold bath might alleviate the pain; so, when we had taken very careful bearings of the cave—whose smoke was invisible in the simmering atmosphere the moment we left it twenty yards behind—we started off for the cataract.

But whereas on our way to the cave we were reckless of danger, we found that since we had established even such a graceless substitute for a home as Grogan Guthrie's cave we were inclined to be much too cautious. We could hardly force ourselves forward without elaborate preliminary scouting.

Another view of the skulls and bones did nothing to rearouse courage. We washed in turn, the other standing guard, and wished sincerely five minutes later that we had done nothing of the kind; for the sun seemed to exert more strength than ever after that, and although the first evaporation of the wet skin through our clothing cooled us the reaction almost immediately afterward was overwhelming. Instead of pressing forward with strength renewed we took cover on a ledge under an over-jutting rock that gave us a considerable view while protecting us from the sun when we hugged the wall closely enough.

"I guess like a poker-player," said Will. "I'm doing it all the time. What I know don't keep me awake, but what the other fellow knows and I don't makes me curious. I'm figuring on where that secret cave can be. S'posing what that Guthrie says has ten cents worth o' truth in it, then the German professor guy ought to be running short of canned eats. Get me?"

"So far; but I don't see where it leads."

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"His violent exercise, tramping these gosh-awful rocks and hunting folk—who must hold life mighty precious to cling to it in this place—folk able to keep him hustling, ought to have given him an appetite, supposing such a bloodthirsty gink has any human traits remaining. Get that?"

"Yes."

"Let's suppose he has an appetite. Let's suppose a square meal of bully beef and canned tomatoes, with a piece of cheese and some pineapple, is more to him at the moment than discretion. He's thinking o' those private stores o' his. He's figuring he can maybe make the secret cave without Guthrie being any wiser, specially since he knows the man's sick and maybe isn't sure he's even alive any more. How about it? Do you see the point?"

"No."

"My! Aren't you astute! Suppose he's hungry—and thinking of the cave—and actually making for it when we first saw him. Suppose the reason he changed his mind and ran, after starting to climb up toward us, was that he didn't propose to give utter strangers a line on where the treasure is? Wouldn't you deduce that the entrance to his treasure cave is somewhere near where we stood when he fired at us and we fired back at him?"

"I've been thinking along a different line," I answered. "Do you remember—or were you saying your prayers with eyes shut?—that when Osman bin Omar turned the ship toward the island he seemed to be running for a sort of haven, protected by a curving arm of rock? We struck to the south of that arm, if I remember rightly. My idea is that we'd do well to explore in the direction of the haven. There may be anything there—might find our crowd there—they'd be likely to cling to the beach and eat fish."

"I'm for the cave, you're for the haven," said Will. "Let's match for it!"

I agreed to anything that would add a suspicion of the mildest possible sporting interest to a dilemma, either prong of which was hopeless, and we searched our pockets. Neither of us had a coin.

"Nothing to toss with! How shall we decide it?"

"Here!" said a gruff voice that frightened us nearly out of our sunburned skins. "I got a coin. I toss!"

OSMAN BIN OMAR'S turbaned head appeared around the rock and he favored us with one of his rare grins, more full of mischief than a boy's.

"You old scoundrel!" said Will. "You promised to keep an eye on the man in the cave."

"That —— man promise me fifty —— pound to come keep eye on you two! No more ship, fifty —— pound a heap o' money!"

"How do you know," I demanded, "that he isn't following the three of us?"

"I make —— sure!" he answered.

"How?"

"Tie um feet!"

"But what proof have you he'll give you the money?" asked Will.

Osman fumbled in his garments and produced a clean, crisp fifty-pound Bank of England note.

"He talk. Me take!" he answered grimly.

"Let's decide our question," I said. "Lend us the coin, Omar."

"You head—he tail—I toss," he stipulated.

"Not a bit of it," Will answered. "Give me the coin. You've a scheme of some sort up your sleeve. My friend can call and I'll do the tossing."

"He call heads," said Osman. "Heads—go look for —— cave!"

"Give me the coin then. I don't care which he chooses."

Reluctantly Osman unfolded a coin from his belt and passed it to Will, who spun it in the air without a glance at it. It rang on the rock heads uppermost. Osman reached out his sinewy hand to snatch it back, but something made Will suspicious. Not that there was anything suspicious in a man of Osman's caliber being nervous on account of his own money, but he tried too hard to look innocent, and Will picked up the coin too quickly for him. He turned it over, laughed and showed it to me.

It was the double-headed English penny with which the old rascal had beaten us out of the lawyer's fee in Bombay when we drew the contract.

Will gave it back to him with the air of a king bestowing a decoration on the field of battle.

"Why are you so anxious we should look for the cave?" he asked.

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"—— man promise me hundred pound s'posing you find it and me tell him!"

Then I thought of a bright idea.

"Did you get the hundred yet?" I asked.

"Me tie um legs. Me take!"

"I don't believe it. Show me!"

He fumbled, and produced a hundred-pound note, new and neatly folded like the other one.

"Will," I said triumphantly, "this old ruffian is honest according to a standard of his own. He wouldn't have taken that money if he hadn't more than a notion where the cave is!"

"Is that right, Osman?" Will demanded. "Do you know how to find the cave?"

"You —— bet I do!"

"Go ahead, then! Lead the way!"

"How much you —— give me?" he retorted.

"Not one —— cent, you pirate! I hold you to contract! You're to pilot us to the best of your ability to any place on earth we name! Lead on to the cave in question!"

"All right," said Osman bin Omar. "You pay me, —— fool; no pay me, all right!"

"Are you sure it's the right cave?" I asked. "How did you come to find it?"

Before answering he spat half-a-dozen times and looked cautiously about him, as if he thought the rocks had ears.

"Come ashore—hungry—look for grub—climb—walk—sit down. Man come with rifle—man see me—shoot—run —— quick—duck—hide—stop—look-see—man watch—me watch—me wonder what —— man shoot for—why he watch—what —— thing there he no want me to know about—me, —— eyes very good indeed—watch like ——. Soon see place in among stones he not wanting me to know about—wait a —— long time—byumby he go away—creep closer, —— careful, —— slow—take a look-see—dark place—me afraid—run away —— quick—man see me run—shoot—miss—so I take you there an' you learn whether I tell lies. I truthful feller."

After reeling off that Odyssey he grew impatient and started down the rocks without waiting for us.

"Very —— hot now," he called back. "—— man he keep quiet in shadow somewhere. Byumby getting cool, —— man coming out and look-see—catch um—shoot um—better you hurry!"

It sounded like good advice. If the murderer took any rest at all it was likely he would choose the hottest part of day for it. Will and I made haste to follow Osman, finding endurance easier now that we had a colored man to remind us of the white man's privilege. He suffered more than we, for his feet were bare and the hot rocks roasted them; but the desire to earn the hundred pounds he had taken in advance outweighed discomfort, or else, like ourselves—and it was just as likely—he was conscious of the color line and refused to sing small.

It was we who called a halt first. The man had a compass under that thick skull of his and never hesitated, until at last we yelled to him and threw ourselves down in the shadow of a boulder. Above us I recognized the crag on which we had stood when we saw the bearded German have his duel with the woman.

He beckoned to us, but we refused to move another yard until we had rested. Watching his impatient gestures, I saw beyond him. Up on a high crag, close beside the one I recognized, outlined against the brazen sky, I saw the woman again.

Osman did not see her. She was standing erect with our two blankets wrapped about her and held a large stone poised in both hands above her head. I nudged Will and he looked up. We both saw her hurl the stone—almost straight downward with all her might—and then stoop over to see what harm she had done. Then we heard two rifle-shots in quick succession. At the second she pitched forward silently and fell headlong out of sight.

"So he has got her at last!" we said both together.

And then a sight that was not horrible at all, but that made the hair on the back of my head rise by its total unexpectedness, changed the whole prospect in an instant.

A hand—freckled and adorned with curly, long, red hairs—not by any stretch of imagination to be mistaken for a colored man's or woman's—lifted itself cautiously above a rock not far from us and was followed by a khaki helmet.

Then, one eye at a time, the upper part of a sunburnt face appeared—then a hairy upper lip—then a smile—then the other hand—and Perkins, one of our five seamen from the *Daisy*, hoisted himself to the top of the rock, peered about him and lay flat.

"Psssst!"

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HE NO more needed to call our attention than if he had been a serpent and we birds within his power, but he went through the form of it with the gusto of a boy playing a game.

"You're in the way, gents! You're lying on the very line the guy's supposed to take! Come out o' the way, please, or Miss Gracie'll raise Cain! We'll have it to do all over if you head him back!"

We beckoned Osman, who seemed horribly disappointed until he, too, caught sight of Perkins. Then his face wrinkled up into one vast grin and he followed us at top speed. Perkins led over a maze of tumbled rocks that were hotter than the fabled lid of Tophet, stopping at last on a square one that provided room for all of us to lie abreast—albeit not in shadow.

"Let yourselves be seen now," he advised. "His shooting's wild. He got the poor girl a minute ago, but she was a target nobody could miss, standing like that against the sky-line!"

"For the land's sake, explain!" said Will. "We're not mind-readers!"

"Oh, is this the first you've seen of our party? Well now! I made sure you'd met up wi' Miss Gracie earlier and she'd set you to driving. No? Mr. Monty took charge o' the drive at first, but ——"

"Then is Lord Montdidier safe?"

"Yes, only we've taken to calling him Mr. Monty. So is Mr. Oakes and Mrs. Ellis and the rest of us. We all got safe ashore. We started first to look for you gents and this affair developed out of it. As I was saying, Mr. Monty had charge o' the drive at first, but then Miss Gracie, she got impatient and so-to-speak superseded him—not that he minded, he just laughed. We're after a man wi' a great beard and a rifle, who was hunting that poor bit of a girl in the mountains like she was a pantheress or something!"

"Tell us the plan," I said.

I was lying next him, with Will next to me straining to listen and Osman on the outside. Osman was not paying any attention to the talk.

"Well, sir, Miss Gracie, she's furious. We all got a sight of the poor girl close up and we tried to catch her, so's to tame her, I suppose. And we all saw the man wi' the long beard shoot at her. And in less than no time we was spread all around in a circle to round him up and bring him to book for his conduct—wi' strict orders from Miss Gracie not to hesitate to pistol him in case he proves obstreperous. She'll be glad you've come. Three extra, supposing you count the colored gent, will be a godsend to help out the line; we're all too few."

"But where have you been staying?"

"Didn't you know that, sir? Well, we doped it out—at least Miss Gracie and Mr. Monty and Mr. Fred did — that the cave we're staying in belongs to the guy with the gun that we're all after. We came on it the very first thing the morning after we got ashore. Mr. Fred was scouting for something to shoot—you know what a fine shot Mr. Fred is—and thought he recognized the marks where a man had clambered over the rocks with boots on. He followed the track and took a chance, being as fearless as they make 'em. Presently he came back and took us to the cave, and there was food in there—lots of it—and a great stone cistern full o' sweet water. But wait till you've seen it!

"The theory is that the man must be hungry and ought to be heading up about this time for his store o' provisions. We're keeping him on the run. We don't think he knows we've occupied his cave. The entrance to it is not much more than fifty feet from where you lay when I came on you!"

"D'you mean you want him in the cave?"

"That's the idea! Once he's in we figure we can smoke him out again pretty well whenever we see fit. We've heard him do a lot o' shooting in the short while we've been on the island and we've seen more human bones than is right or proper. He has had a crack at more than one of us, Miss Gracie herself included, and we're minded to ask him what he has to say for himself face to face, in a manner of saying."

"Listen!" said Will.

"Look!" whispered Osman, whose eyes had been very busy all the time we talked.

There came a sound of something dragging among the rocks, and heavy breathing. Osman on the outside could see down lower than we. He grinned sardonically.

"Me tie um—good sailor-fashion!" he said in a low voice full of contentment.

The dragging sound continued, accompanied by the short, sharp panting of a human struggling with all his might. I crept a few inches further forward and

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peered over the edge of the rock. One look was enough and I drew back. Will did the same.

Underneath us was Grogan Guthrie, with his legs tied, dragging himself along by painful inches on his hands and knees toward the opening between two boulders, fifty yards beyond which Perkins had told us the cave mouth was.

"Got to give it to him," Will whispered. "He sure is some persistent sleuth!"

"Me follow you—him follow me—money mine all right!" announced Osman in a loud voice.

But Guthrie down below us was in no condition to hear anything. He was pressing forward with the obsession of a maniac, oblivious of all except his goal and too close to death to be concerned about bleeding knees and hands and elbows.

He had no hat. How the sun had failed to put an end to him was mystery. He must have taken the full force of it on the back of his head and his neck and back all along that hot, hard trail. No sane man could have done that. No sane man would have dared crawl forward into such a trap without taking any precaution.

He passed us and rounded a boulder out of sight. We heard him scuffling along until at last a laugh like a wild beast's, sounding hollow in the cave mouth, announced that he had reached his goal. The laugh died in a gurgle as he crawled into the cave.

Soon after that we heard shouts behind us and I thought I recognized Monty's voice. Then I was quite sure I heard Gracie's.

"There they are!" grinned Perkins. "Hard behind him! They figure he'll take no chances on doubling back as long as they're so close and there's that hiding-hole in front of him! Gee, but they must have sweated to throw the line all around that way! I've had the best end of it lying here!"

A LITTLE while after that we heard another sound among the rocks below, swifter and more stealthy than the scuffling made by Guthrie. We held our breath and lay so flat along the rock that our eyes could barely see down over its rim. A moment later the man with the rifle came into view whom Will and I now knew for Schindler; more than six feet tall, he was broad and deep and wiry, with a brown beard down to his middle and the stride of a man who had stalked game all his life.

He seemed to make no effort to move quietly and yet made less noise with leather-soled feet than Guthrie had made on all-fours. He was coming fast, but his breathing was even and he did not once look behind him, as a hunted man might be expected to do.

It entered my head then that the one thing was to save Grogan Guthrie from the Nemesis hard on his heels. The mental picture of a sick man, with his legs tied, at the mercy of that bearded fiend was too strong for discretion or any other thought. I slipped down from the rock, only to find that Osman bin Omar had conceived some thought that produced an exactly similar effect, for he was running along ahead of me at a speed I could not hope to emulate.

He could not have done me a more signal service, though neither he nor I knew that at the minute. His bare feet made very little sound on the rock, so that when Schindler heard my heavier footfall and faced about at last to do more murder his enemy was nearer than he imagined, and the too ready rifle missed its aim.

The report of the rifle rattled among the boulders. I redoubled my efforts. Will raced after me—Perkins after him, all making noise enough by that time to awake the island's echoes. Emerging into an open space about thirty feet across, I saw a nearly round, black hole in the rock-wall. I did not realize at first that I saw it between Schindler's outstretched legs.

He was standing with his back to the hole, with Osman bin Omar gripped in both hands and swung up above his head to be brained like a puppy. He had dropped the rifle and had our old captain paralyzed and helpless in the grip of his iron fingers. As he saw me he raised Osman's body another inch higher, to dash him and smash him on the rock. Not knowing what I did, I spurted and ran in under, receiving the full force of Osman's descent on my back and shoulders.

The wonder was that it did not stun me. It knocked me down like a pole-axed bullock but left me with strength and sense enough to grip the German's legs and haul on them with all my might. A second later I heard Will's battle-shout and then felt a huge spasm pass down the

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German's frame as both Will and Perkins closed with him. But that did not finish the fight by a long way.

He wrenched, tore himself almost loose and backed into the cave-mouth, we clinging to him like hounds to a hunted boar. In another moment we were rolling on the floor of a dark cavern, fighting like maniacs, the German bellowing with agony as Osman twisted lengths of the owing beard about his wrist and hauled at it as if he were trying to up-anchor in a tide rip.

Never was such berserk fury as that German's since the day when the viking pirates harried Britain's coasts and were brought to bay along some lonely beach. Again and again in the dark he flung us from him, only Osman managing to cling to the twisted beard. Over and over again we all went down together in a struggling confusion of arms and legs, to be borne to our feet again on top of the man's enormous strength and flung to all four quarters of the compass.

Again and again we closed—always excepting Osman, who clung to the beard and swung there like a bull-dog—and were received by fists that beat through the dark like flails. The weight of his blows was like the concussion of wooden clubs; his speed was unbelievable. I believe he would have killed the lot of us but for a sudden blaze of light that dazzled him. Somebody had come into the cave, struck a match, lit a lamp and was holding it now above his head.

Blinded by the glare, the German struck out a dozen times before he realized that the darkness had been his chief ally. Our eyes grew accustomed to the light as soon as his, and in a second more we should have mastered him. But he realized the situation in the nick of time and devoted all his colossal strength to one supreme spasm of fury. Even Osman was hurled on his face on the ground, a yard of brown beard in either hand, and we were thrown off like chips from a wheel.

He made a dash for the opening but that was darkened by more people hurrying in, one behind the other. He might have killed the first one with his enormous fist, but that would have left another, and another; and we were behind to have interfered with that performance. So he ran around the cave like a three-quarter-back at Rugby football carrying the ball over the opponents' goal-line and took refuge in the shadows among a pile of boulders in the rear.

Then at last we turned to look at the man who held the lamp. It threw one side of him in shadow, but a man half-blind could have recognized Monty from the stature, attitude and general air of being perfectly at ease whatever the circumstances. It was the face that was unbelievable — the long mustache-ends drooping instead of waxed, and the dark beard, half-a-week old.

The spirit was unchanged, for his hand did not tremble and his smile was reassuring, but his clothes were as torn as ours; he was as dirty as we and as battered about the knees and elbows; he looked on the surface more like a tramp than an English nobleman. We were too out of breath to speak to him and he too bent on holding the lamp so that light would reach into the farthest corner of the cave to speak to us.

"Didums, you look like the devil!" said a cheery voice we all knew well, and Fred Oakes entered, getting up from all fours with the grace of a kangaroo.

He had his concertina with him, strapped across his shoulder like a knapsack. He took one long look at us, laughed and threw his arms out. In another second he was hugging us like the Scriptural she-bear, we cursing him for torturing our bruises.

Fred did not look particularly disheveled, but that was the advantage of always wearing a beard. Close inspection proved him to be as battered and torn as anybody else but possessed of a more boisterous spirit that conquered all appearances. He made as much fuss of Osman bin Omar as of us and was perfectly in his element, much happier there than in any place where conventions ruled.

Then Alice Ellis came in and was shyly pleased to see us. Then the four other New England seamen; Monty told two of them to stand close by the opening and prevent the German's escape. Last of all Gracie Vandam came in, hot but radiant, illustrating the everlasting miracle of how some women can look lovely where unlovely man collapses into disarray.

Her dress was torn and a bleeding bare knee showed through a gap in skirt and stocking. Convention had nothing whatever to do with the way her hair was disarranged. Her sun-helmet was broken.

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One of her hands was bleeding from chafing on the hot rocks. But nobody could have possibly mistaken her for anything but a lady, and a wealthy, well taught one at that.

"Boys!" she said, laughing at us by the light of Monty's lamp.

She took the lamp away from him and held it so as to see us better. Then she gave it back to him and discovered whiskered places that the German had not bruised with his huge fists and kissed us both.

"I'm more glad to see you than if you were gold and silver!"

I judged by that they had found no bullion in the cave.

Then, because she did not know just what to do about Osman but surely wished to express delight at seeing him, she took him by the hands and began to dance him round. Monty passed the lantern to a seaman and in a moment we had all joined hands and were dancing "Ring-around-the-rosy" in spite of wounds and weary feet.

Osman bin Omar seemed to imagine it was some sort of religious exercise and went at it sanctimoniously, until we all dropped from sheer exhaustion, except Monty, who found more lamps and lit them.

THEN we all began to talk at once, all asking questions, and then more questions before the first were answered, until suddenly a new alarm reduced us to silence. A noise between a roar of rage and scream for help recalled our attention to the fact that an enemy was in the cave. The three seamen who were not on guard by the entrance raced all together to the far end of the cavern and we could see that they pounced on something.

A swift struggle followed among the shadows and they came back dragging something between them. One of the seamen had a hand to his eye, where a fist like a sledge-hammer had landed. The thing they dragged groaned and gasped.

"Grogan Guthrie!" said Will. "Grogan Guthrie with his legs still tied!"

We laid the dying man on the floor between us and made Osman bin Omar unlash the legs he had secured so cunningly, yet with so little avail.

"Don't let that incarnate fiend escape you!" Guthrie exploded, forcing himself into a sitting posture. "A minute ago he tried to murder me, because he knew I would tell you about him otherwise. Shoot him! He is like a rat in a trap now! Show him no mercy!"

Monty walked without hurry toward the corner whence the seamen had rescued Guthrie. Fred, who was the next least battered of us, followed. Monty told Fred to keep behind him; yet I noticed that he was not holding his pistol in his hand or prepared for a fight in any other way that I could see.

"Come out of that!" he ordered, directing his voice into the shadows. "If you don't, you shall be tied and dragged out feet first. If you come, you shall have decent treatment."

I had begun to suppose the German was a raving maniac, but the reason of Monty's quiet ultimatum appealed to him at once and he came striding out of the dark corner like an ogre in a picture out of a fairy book. It was only then that I realized what damage we had done him. His clothes were torn and he was a mass of bruises. One eye was altogether closed. His beard that Osman had thinned by handfuls was matted with blood from his nose; and for all the swaggering pride of strength expressed in his stride, he limped.

"That'll do," said Monty. "Stand there."

He stood in the midst of us, eying us balefully, scanning each of us in turn with unhurried deliberation.

"English — uh! — Americans — uh! — and one Asiatic—uh! None of you have jurisdiction over me!" he announced at last.

At that Guthrie recovered waning strangth again, like a candle burning down into the socket.

"The fiend!" he screamed. "Whoever lets that fiend incarnate live another day shall answer to God for it! He has murdered three hundred men and women! He has murdered me! He murdered Charles Dent! He tried to murder me again just now, as if once were not enough!"

"You shut up!" growled the German. "You hear what he says. The man is raving. He is mad."

"Counting Osman bin Omar and not counting the accuser, we are twelve men and women," said Monty grimly.

"What of it?" the German snorted.

"Have you heard of trial by jury?"

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"Women on a jury!" the German answered with a laugh of such whole-souled scorn that I began again to believe him mad.

"I could not sit on the jury in any case," said Grace Vandam. "I am a witness against him. I saw him with my own eyes shoot that poor wild woman. I went to the foot of the crag and found her broken body, with a festered bullet wound in the arm and a newly made one in the breast. I, too, charge him with murder!"

"You saw her?" yelled the German. "You found her? Where is the ring, then? What have you done with the ring she was wearing?"

"Did you think I would strip a corpse?" asked Grace in amazement.

"You fool!" the prisoner thundered. "You double-dyed, sentimental fool! Go and get the ring—or let me go and get it! The setting is worth a Kaiser's ransom and the stone is a rose diamond as big as the Koh-i-noor! Oh, you double ——, blind asses! Don't you know a fortune when you see it?"

"I don't know just what administration this island falls under," said Monty, "but I am a privy councillor of England, and I dare assume responsibility under the circumstances. If the Indian Penal Code covers this territory, then I rely on the former authority granted me as official resident at Palanpur, which included powers of a first-class magistrate."

"I repudiate your alleged authority!"

"You'll have right of appeal, of course," said Monty blandly.

"Rot!" I said. "Let's kick the brute into the sea and let the sharks attend to him!"

The German eyed me with swift concern, but Monty ignored the remark.

"I impanel a jury," said Monty. "The greatest number obtainable at the time and place."

"I can tell these are Americans," the German retorted. "You have no authority over Americans nor have they any right to try me on British territory!"

Monty smiled.

"Several times," he answered, "I have seen United States Americans—missionaries, for instance—impaneled against their will on British juries. They have invariably given close attention to the case and a fair verdict, which I have seen upheld by the courts of appeal. Mrs. Ellis—will you kindly get the pens and paper we found in the box in the cave? I appoint you clerk."

"My pens and paper!" the German snorted.

"There shall be no compulsory panel on this occasion," said Monty. "Any one unwilling to serve on the jury may leave the court."

No one moved or objected.

"Very well, then. Fred, you're foreman. You and Will, and you five seamen, raise your right hands and swear to give a true and honest verdict in this case according to the evidence."

We did as ordered, he making sure we each spoke.

"Very well, then. Write down the names of the jurymen, Mrs. Ellis."

VII

THE trial would have gone on there and then, had not Guthrie, our most important witness, been seized with a fainting spell.

"Can't we do without his evidence?" said I.

"No," said Monty sternly. "Circumstances oblige us to live on this island, for all we know for the rest of our lives, and we find this person already in occupation. But no law of God or man can compel us to tolerat a murderer in our midst. Our plain duty is to arrive at the facts and then to do justice in the name of the law that we all agree to honor."

There was nothing to do under the circumstances but to adjourn. Fred, as foreman, suggested an interval for lunch, and that was agreed to. Grace Vandam went and cooked canned meat and vegetables for all of us over a fire in the corner.

"That's all gammon about staying here all our lives!" she asserted. "You'll all see the *Daisy* in the offing before long!"

"I heard you tell Captain McGraw to take her back to New York," said I.

"D'you think he'll obey me?" she asked with an air of surprize. "That man doesn't believe a woman has the right to sign her own check, let alone direct a yacht's destinies. He'll elect to go to New York through the Suez Canal and turn aside to see what has happened here or my name is Jezebel!"

That being the most hopeful opinion any

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one had voiced yet and its accuracy seeming fairly likely on reflection, Osman bin Omar was appointed a committee of one, to choose himself a lookout post and to occupy it at fixed, short intervals. Then Fred took Will and me to look at the treasures the cave contained and, seeing us so occupied, the German flew into a new passion.

"What do you fools know of such things? Leave them alone! Don't touch them!"

There were four seamen guarding him or he would have flung himself at us and put up another fight.

"I was here first! I braved the islanders single-handed! I made myself king of them in all but name! How dare you late-comers have the insolence to take my booty away? —— you, put those down! Did you have the hardihood to make love to a savage chief's lawful wife and so win this secret? No! Then put those treasures down! You skulking thieves! Have you labored for years on this hell of an island, with only one end in view? No! You came late, by an accident! Then do justice, that you brag about, and go away and leave my treasures to me! Those are things whose worth such fools as you aren't able to imagine! Put them down, I say!"

His language became so abominable that Monty threatened to have him trussed up and laid on a rock in the sun to wait until Guthrie should recover consciousness. The threat of the physical discomfort did not seem to disturb him but he suffered at the thought of what we might do to the treasures in his absence and kept his language for a while within the confines of common decency.

Candidly, neither Will nor I was able to appraise the value of the treasure at all. There was a stone chest nearly full of manuscripts, written in strange characters on parchments so ancient that they cracked if they were touched.

There was one brass box of jewelry that looked rather crude to me, for the stones had lost long ago whatever sheen and brilliancy they once had. Then there was a case full of ancient weapons; and the stone water-cistern that Monty vowed was priceless but that could not possibly be removed from the cave by any means at our disposal.

But the treasure of treasures—the thing that made the German curse and swear and clench his fists whenever one of us touched it—was a model of a building about two feet by three, made of gold and silver and so heavy I could scarcely move it. It was doubtless as old as the manuscripts in the stone chest, for it bore the marks of age—of knocks made during transportation, and the stains of time.

"Contemporary model of the Temple at Jerusalem," said Fred.

"How in the world was it preserved?" I wondered, as Will and I stooped to examine the wonderful details.

"Maybe the islanders worshiped it," said Fred. "Don't you suppose that Barabbas may have seen the value of religion to hold his followers together and that perhaps he brought this model back from one of his raiding trips with that idea? They might easily miss the real meaning of it; within two or three generations respect for the symbol would degenerate into idol worship. The existence of that thing would account then for such a devil of an island continuing to be inhabited; they'd come to associate the place with the thing. But think what the antiquarians are going to say about it!"

The thing was perfect. Even the costumes of the miniature priests who stood on the steps were worked out in minutest detail. We set a lamp near and examined it until Guthrie began to recover. Then he, too, demanded to see the prize that had cost him his life in a vain effort to obtain. We helped him close to it, and he pawed it with trembling fingers; but he seemed to think the old cracked manuscripts were more precious and wanted to dig among them.

Strangely enough, sight of the man, who never would be able to exploit them, touching and fondling the treasures seemed to enrage Schindler even more than our possession of them. Perhaps it was the knowledge that Guthrie could estimate the stuff's real value. He could be jealous of the professional mind, whereas he was merely indignantly contemptuous of us.

At any rate he suddenly became beside himself with passion, burst free from his guards and landed with both feet on the small of Guthrie's back. Monty's swift fist struck him under the jaw and knocked him down too late. Guthrie was done for.

Finding himself free, the German sprang to his feet, dodged his captors again and

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ran around the cavern. Monty made a beeline for the opening. Will and I were too stiff and bruised to make any swift movements at all. Seeing Monty in the way between him and outer freedom, Schindler lowered his head and charged with a roar like a bull's.

Monty stood his ground and the two went down together in the jaws of the opening. They became jammed there by Schindler's struggles, so that to loosen them we had to drag Monty toward us by the heels. And then, with a vicious kick that missed Monty's head by a hair's breadth, the German broke through into the open and was gone.

We had taken his ammunition from him, but his rifle was outside, leaning against a rock where one of the seamen had picked it up and left it. He snatched it as he went by.

"And likely as not he's got a cavefull of cartridges somewhere!" shouted Will.

"After him, then!" said Monty. "Catch him or kill him before he can arm himself! We've all seen him do murder!"

We poured out of the cave in a stream, the women last, for they had pistols and there was no need of any one to stay on Guthrie's account. He had gone to his reckoning with both hands full of the parchments the lust to obtain which had made such a huckster of him.

It was useless to try to follow along the narrow fissures and bottoms of ravines, for we were in pursuit of a man who had lived years on the island and in all probability knew by heart every track. We had to make for the higher levels in the hope of seeing him whenever he crossed from hole to hole or shinned along a ridge. Will and I, being more sorely bruised than any one, were given stationary posts on near-by prominences, to watch for him and shoot him should he try to double back.

SO WE sat and heard the hue and cry go rising and falling away from us, making the sea-birds wheel in curious curves and stirring all the echoes of the rocks. Then, when the pursuit had taken the party almost out of hearing, both Will and I saw a man's back at the same time and both of us fired. The man promptly disappeared and we, standing on our rocks and jumping in the effort to see down between the boulders, began shouting with all our might to turn the pack again.

Presently we saw the man and fired again, but we both missed. Pistol shooting in the glare on granite rocks is far from easy when you are tired and bruised. The man was heading in the direction of the place where Will and I had landed, or a little to the north of that, and we were tempted to leave our posts and go after him.

But then I thought I saw him again a long way to the right of where he had been, so that he seemed to be making a zigzag course. Will could not see him, although I gave him the new direction and we both sent a shot down among the rocks in the hope of a lucky hit. Then we yelled and yelled again. Grace Vandam was the first to hear us.

Being last to start, she was nearest, on the left end of the line. She shouted to the others and headed back at once. Several times I saw her scrambling over the granite ledges or jumping from one rock to the next. Once or twice I saw the others, scattered in an irregular line that had become much too drawn out.

Suddenly I caught sight of Schindler and realized that he, too, had seen Gracie. He was well out of range of Will's pistol and mine. Between us and him was a mass of saw-tooth rocks that would have taxed the ingenuity of a wildcat to hurry across. He was lurking under the shoulder of a comparatively small rock in Grace's path. His intention was perfectly obvious.

We could not make her stop. We could not make her see him. We did not dare shoot, because at that long range the shots would surely have gone wild and Grace Vandam would more likely have been hit than the German. We simply danced and yelled. And the more we yelled, the more she believed we were urging her to hurry, and she scrambled along toward the man at her utmost speed.

Too late we began to clamber off our rocks and try to scramble to other vantage points from which to shoot at a wider, safer angle. She was too near Schindler before we started. By the time I had swarmed up to another pinnacle fifty yards away she was standing directly over him, peering this way and that for a view.

I yelled again, for I saw him begin to crawl toward her rear. She stared in exactly the opposite direction from that

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I intended and Schindler took full advantage of that. Desperate, at last I fired at him and missed. But the bullet struck the rocks to his right and, hearing that, Grace faced about.

At that very second Schindler sprang at her. I heard her scream—and it was as different from the other woman's who had cried by night as a sea-gull's is from an eagle's. I saw the flash of her pistol just as he seized her in his huge arms; but heard no report and judged by that he must have stopped the bullet from a muzzle pressed against his body. The last I saw of them they were falling, with Grace on top, and Will and I began running, without breath and without plan, not hoping exactly but simply unable to stay where we were until we knew the worst.

At that we were not the first to reach the spot. When we had clambered over the last ridge we found Monty there ahead of us, offering Grace his absolutely last cigaret with the air of a man who gives absolutely nothing. The German's dead body lay beside them. Grace took no more notice of it than if it had been a bundle of rags.

"She didn't kill him," said Monty casually. "The blighter fell under her and broke his neck."

"Didn't her bullet go into the brute?" I asked.

"No. Passed through the coat and never touched him!"

"I wish I had shot him all the same!" said Grace. "I'd have counted it for that poor woman he was hunting over the hills!"

The party rejoined us one by one. We searched Schindler's body for information as to further treasure but found nothing more than a map of the island done very carefully and cleverly on tracing paper. The cave where we had found treasure was marked with a large cross and several other caves were indicated, in one of which no doubt he had lived with Guthrie off Guthrie's provisions.

We started back to the treasure cave, meaning to look over that again and discuss some sort of plan, when I began to puzzle over what Will and I had seen from our two rocks while the rest were hunting in line.

"Do you believe it was possible," I asked Will, "for that man Schindler—that great, heavy, bull of a man, to appear in two places so far apart at such short interval?"

"I thought it all right at the time," he answered.

"So did I at the time," I said, "but think again. Was it possible? We have crossed that ground since, on our way here. You know now what it's like. Could any man have been in those two places within that number of seconds?"

"No!" said Will. "Now I think of it, he couldn't!"

"Then there's another man on the island!" I said.

"Osman bin Omar!" said somebody.

"No," said I. "Osman's coat is a dingy brown. The man whose back I saw was wearing washed-out khaki, the same as Schindler's."

"Right," said Will.

"Good lord! We've no proof the island isn't still full of murderers!" grumbled Fred. "Are we to spend the rest of our days in guerilla warfare with men who shoot women like cats on a roof?"

"Back to the cave!" ordered Monty. "Whoever knows about the treasure will come there sooner or later. Any one ignorant of what's in there isn't so likely to be an enemy. Come on!"

So we headed back cautiously, once more spaced out in line, with Monty and three of the New England seamen well to the rear to guard against surprizes. So it was only in keeping with all the happening of that eventful day that surprize should come, but from the front—the unexpected quarter.

It was Grace Vandam who saw a man's head and shouted to us all.

"I thought he was a white man!" she called to us. "Don't shoot, any one, until we're positive!"

The prospect of a new hunt across the blazing rocks after all that exhausting excitement did not please any of us much—Grace, I think, least of all; but nobody cared to display a white feather and we wheeled our line half-right at Monty's word without remonstrance. But it was a slow, dispirited maneuver.

IT WAS very soon evident that the two women had reached their limit of expended effort. There was not anything even remotely resembling a foot-path in the direction we had to take;

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and the strongest of us was so nearly exhausted that a fight of any sort was likely to prove a farce. So Grace Vandam and Alice Ellis were sent back to the treasure cavern, protesting but resigned.

Ten minutes later Will and I threw up the sponge. Will had to be lifted out of a hole into which he had fallen and I was in scarcely better plight. I could no more climb the smooth granite slope in front of me than I could drag out Will single-handed. Yet Monty shouted that he had seen the man we were pursuing scramble over the top of the slope and there was no easier way around.

So they sent Will and me back to join the women, with the comforting advice to lie still in case we got stuck and could not help ourselves. They promised to look out for us on their way back and carry us home if need be.

And the word "home" was not such an empty jest as it sounded. That cavern, with Guthrie's broken body in it and the treasure and the food and the cistern full of tepid water was headquarters, whatever its other associations. It was the best we had and likely to be the best for many a long, hot week to come. But added to that it sheltered two women and, whatever the explanation of that, the fact remains that even the primitive cave man regards as home the place where the women of his party happen to be.

So it was easy enough to retrace our steps. A foundered horse, a dog with a broken leg, the spent fox whom the hounds have over-run, can generally limp home, even if home is a barrel or a draughty lean-to shack. We found we had actually strength to spare and curiosity enough to wonder how and why Osman bin Omar had managed with his sharp eyes not to see the man in khaki and give the alarm.

Curiosity grew. We sat down to look for him, examining the heights one by one without success. Finally we screwed up sufficient extra energy to hunt for him a while along the less difficult ravines. And we came on him at last below the crag from which the woman of the island had pitched headlong when Schindler shot her.

The old sea-rover saw us first and made believe to be doing anything but looting a corpse. But we remembered Schindler's anxiety to get the woman's jewelry, and that Osman bin Omar had been present in the cavern with ears cocked. The body was crushed almost out of recognition and the birds had already begun their task of scavenging. But the birds did not explain the outstretched arm and the finger that was cut off cleanly.

"Come here, Osman!" said Will.

The man of the sea demurred.

"No——ship no more," he shouted. "Got to buy 'nother——ship!"

"Which is it to be?" Will demanded. "Peace or war?"

"I go keep —— look-out!" he answered, starting off at once to climb the peak.

"See here," said Will, sitting down on a rock and covering Omar with his pistol. "If we ever get away from this island, you'll get your full contract price for your services in cash. You're not entitled to anything else. You hand over what you've got there!"

Osman showed his knowledge of human nature, or at least of Will's good nature, by ignoring the aimed pistol and proceeding on his way. He climbed the peak with the same agility he showed on shipboard, where he habitually went up the masts to make sure his crew had done their work well.

Deciding to postpone the argument until Monty should have a chance to use his influence, we turned back and gathered stones with which to build a cairn over the woman's body. That took us a long time. We had not finished when shouts and jubilant yells from the peak of the crag above us made us suddenly stop work.

Osman bin Omar was dancing on the summit like a lunatic, undignified for the first time since we met him, capering like a six-year-old, clapping his hands and hooting like a steam-engine.

We shouted to know what the matter was but could not make him hear. Instead of taking notice of us he set out at top speed toward the cavern by another route, along ridges that he could see from his superior eminence but that were beyond our ken. We had to take the humbler, longer way by bottoms of ravines. When we reached the cavern at last he had been in there a long time.

He was still jubilant—still unable to behave like a true follower of the Prophet—still snapping his fingers at intervals and jumping up without apparent excuse to

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dance, as if he stood on hot plates and could only cool his feet by furious motion.

"What's the matter with him?" we asked with one voice.

"Oh, nothing," said Alice Ellis.

"Nothing," said Grace.

"Then what's the matter with you two?"

If ever two women were stiff with self-restraint and nearly bursting with excitement, those were they.

"Nothing's the matter," said Grace. "Why have you two turned alarmists?"

We could not stand any longer. We sat on the stone chest that contained the ancient parchments and grew angry, as most men do when women affect superior wisdom.

"I suppose Osman gave you the ring he bit from the dead woman's finger," suggested Will. "I surely would hate to gloat so over a poor dead native's jewelry! I'd be ashamed!"

"You mean you're jealous?" said Grace.

Will turned toward me.

"And they want us to let 'em vote!" he said disgustedly.

"I didn't know Osman had any ring," said Grace. "He certainly hasn't shown it to me."

"Then what are you crowing about?"

"I'm a prophet!"

"Gosh!"

"A true prophet!"

"Say, Gracie, I'm not in a fit state to guess conundrums. I couldn't walk to that cistern and stick my head in to cool it off. Have a heart! Spill the news!"

"You'll know very soon," she answered.

"Here comes the gang back," said I. "Let's hope they've caught their man. Keep an eye on Osman. Don't let the old rascal leave the cave until Monty interviews him."

We could hear voices outside and the tramping of many feet; but only one man at a time could come in through that low opening and it was quite a long time before the hole darkened and somebody crawled through.

He was a bulky-looking man—one of our five seamen I thought at first, only with an air of authority they did not usually assume.

"Miss Gracie is here?" he asked, blinking this way and that.

I knew his voice then.

"Hello, John!" she said, getting up to shake hands with him. "Why didn't you come sooner?"

He fairly gasped.

"I suppose ye mean why did I come at all! I'd orders to take the yacht home as soon as repairs were completed!"

"If I were going to disobey orders I'd blow the lid right off, John," she answered. "I'd do it so fast that the devil and his angels couldn't stop me."

"Wait till you see the *Daisy's* funnel," he answered grimly. "It has been red-hot from Bombay to here. You'll need a new one. As for disobeying orders—I obeyed your dad's, miss. A mere matter o' his being dead don't make any difference to me that I can see."

"I knew it wouldn't!" she answered. "I'd have betted on it! What's that on your cheek, John? No, the other one."

He turned his face to the light and she promptly hugged and kissed him, to his huge embarrassment.

"Haven't done that for fifteen years, have I, John? Now catch Osman for me. Turn him upside down and take that ring away."

VIII

THE work of getting that stone chest and the heavy gold and silver model of the Temple from the cavern to the yacht was performed with prodigious labor and cunning by the *Daisy's* mates and crew. The stone chest weighed a quarter of a ton and had to be hauled over pathless ridges to the beach, where it was lashed to planks between two boats and rowed to the yacht three miles away. For Captain John McGraw had taken no chances with the saw-tooth rocks.

So cautious had he been that he had equipped six of the crew and one mate as a sort of expeditionary force, with rifles for self-protection but strict orders not to shoot unless cornered. It was one of those men whom we had seen and hunted, and he led the pursuers straight toward the beach, where Captain John McGraw was standing guard beside the boats.

There was not a piece of earth anywhere to dig a grave in nor did the sharp sand on the beach appeal to us as suitable; so we emptied the water from the cistern in the cave and laid Guthrie's body in that. There, when they have dragged away the boulders that the whole crew jacked and

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rolled into place before the entrance to the cavern, antiquarians will some day find his skeleton. And doubtless they will imagine that the cistern is a sarcophagus, and that the bones are those of Barabbas himself—especially if the ants shall have been busy with the clothing in the meanwhile.

After that—and when we had all scrubbed ourselves clean again in the various sorts of baths the *Daisy* was fitted with—the ship's log grew into a thing of blots and a joy forever. For, after John McGraw had written in his version of what happened, we each took a turn and wrote on page after smudgy page—ink runs where it meets the drops of sweat—our individual account.

Before we reached Alexandria we had the records—from that of Lord Montdidier and Kirkudbrightshire down to the youngest of the five seamen's—of our impressions of what had taken place and what we saw and heard, set down as nearly at the time as might be, for any one to read who had the right. And there were many, who had no right at all, who tried to move heaven and earth and the consulates to get a look.

Ashore at the hotel we argued long over a settlement, for Grace Vandam insisted on selling all the booty and giving the proceeds to Monty for the support of his estates. And Monty simply laughed at her.

"You're a good girl, Grace," he told her. "A —— nice girl, if I may say so. I'll come to America and dance at your wedding when that time comes, in proof that I mean what I say. But you don't understand."

If there is anything on earth a nice girl hates it is being told she doesn't understand a question of ethics.

"You're simply dirt-proud!" she answered, so that Monty laughed again.

"I'll try to tell you," he answered; for he liked her frankly.

And for the first and last time I heard Monty discuss his own unbending rules of conduct. He died, when his time came, fighting grimly in accordance with the rules, without troubling to explain them or caring in the least whether friend or enemy understood them or not. It took a nice girl, as he had called her, and she of a nation that in those days preferred to regard itself as entirely alien, to get an explanation from him.

"My estates, you know, are held in trust. They're entailed. They go with the title. I didn't ask for the title. I'd have refused it if I could, but it fell to me. It's my duty, worse luck, to try to leave those estates in better shape for the next man, so that he can play the game better. The old order's changing and I don't regret it. Some day, perhaps, there won't be any such estates, but that day isn't yet. The cards in my hands are the ones I have to play, not those to be dealt out later.

"I'd like a million or two to invest in improvements—roads, drains, fences, stock, houses for the tenants and all that kind of thing. But money that came the wrong way would be worse than useless. That's not sentiment, it's iron law.

"My people were never robber barons. The first earl of the line was a statesman and the rest have been soldiers. It's creed with us that a man should leave the world better than he found it. And none of us has flinched.

"So if there's to come a million or two or three from anywhere to shore up the Montdidier estates it'll have to do the world good first before I touch it. A goldmine, for instance. This sort of treasure trove that was stolen very likely in the first place and surely belongs today to humanity at large is not what I need for my purpose."

"And this ring?" she asked.

"Should be worn by a beautiful young woman, if the world is to get the most good from it!"

Of course, that did not much more than begin the argument. She agreed to present all the manuscripts and the Temple model to the British Government; but there was the crew of the *Daisy* to settle with—entitled to their one-third share of the total after deducting expenses. Nobody cared to suggest to them that they should do without their profit, for the simple reason that it would not have been decent to do it. Furthermore, we insisted on our right to pay our share of the cost of the trip.

It was Alice Ellis who suggested the solution of the difficulty. She and Grace Vandam took train to Cairo and interviewed a jeweler. The value he set on the rose-pink diamond in its ancient setting was so tremendous that Grace refused to

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accept it, on the ground that its sale would have made the rest of us rich.

However, we went into accounts then. The crew of the *Daisy* were very well satisfied with fifty pounds a man, and officers in proportion. We bought a new lateen-rigged little ship for Osman bin Omar. After counting all the other expenses for coal and repairs and so on, there was enough balance remaining to offset the diamond to make a very handsome money gift to Alice Ellis, who certainly deserved it, having risked her life as cheerfully as any one, and who needed it beyond a doubt.

So Grace Vandam paid the bills out of her affluence and took the ring; and when you see pictures of the ring in its ancient setting in the New York Sunday papers you will know now that it is not true that she bought it for a million in the rue de Rivoli. This also sets forever at rest that other absurd tale that she bought the ring from Lord Montdidier in order that he might pay his debts. He had not any debts—except mortgages. And they still encumber the estate.

THAT night—the night of the final settlement—we all sat until nearly dawn in Monty's bedroom while Will Yerkes laid down the law.

"You need the money!"

"I admit it."

"Isn't she a darned nice girl?"

"Of course she is."

"Then why don't you marry her? She'd have you like a shot!"

"I don't propose to marry and I don't believe that's true."

"Bonehead! One o' these durned ginks with a title and no morals is going to get her if you don't!"

"I think not," said Monty. "Grace is a very wise young woman."

"Don't you consider her good enough to be a countess?"

Monty laughed.

"Too good!" he answered. "This is final, Will. She is young. I am nearly fifty. I wouldn't consent to inflict myself on a young girl and I'm too confirmed a bachelor to choose an old one. Marry her yourself and I'll come and be best man!"

"Oh, Gracie 'ud never marry me," said Will.

"Good night!" growled Monty. "Get out and let me sleep. Fred, put that cursed concertina away."

THERE was one point left to be settled. We went next evening to Bill's at about the hour when Monty had usually met his most redoubtable opponent at chess. On time like a phase of the moon, the mandarin smiled himself in. We left him to make the approaches.

"You are back? You are well? You are prosperous?" he said, rubbing his hands one above the other. "And Mr. Grogan Guthrie, how is he?"

"Dead," said Monty.

"Ah? Did he die—ah—pleasantly?"

"He died like a dog in a ditch, poor chap."

"Ah. Indeed. Dear me. Dear me."

The mandarin sat back on the plush cushions and seemed to absorb satisfaction through his nostrils. Never was a should-be mourner more indecently contented.

"You sent him to his death!" said I.

The mandarin blinked.

"My dear young Christian friend," he said after a minute, "I have lived up to the letter of your Christian rule. That man did me an evil—a great evil. In return I told him all he wished to know. He asked me for the secret of Barabbas Island and I told him. I withheld nothing. I even told him of the nature of the priceless manuscripts that Charles Dent believed could be recovered there. Did he ever mention, I wonder, that he felt grateful to me for the information I gave him freely?"

"He called you a —— infidel rapscallion less than an hour before he died," said Fred, and the mandarin blinked again.

"Yet I lent him the money with which he hired the men who took him to Barabbas," he said reminiscently.

"What harm did he ever do you?" asked Will.

The mandarin shook his head.

"I never talk of the evil that men do me," he answered. "But tell me this: in your experience, who is most likely the debtor—he who says nothing or he who calls names?"

"I begin to see at last through the theory of your game of chess," said Monty.

"Ah! Let us play a game!"

"Thanks; I think not."

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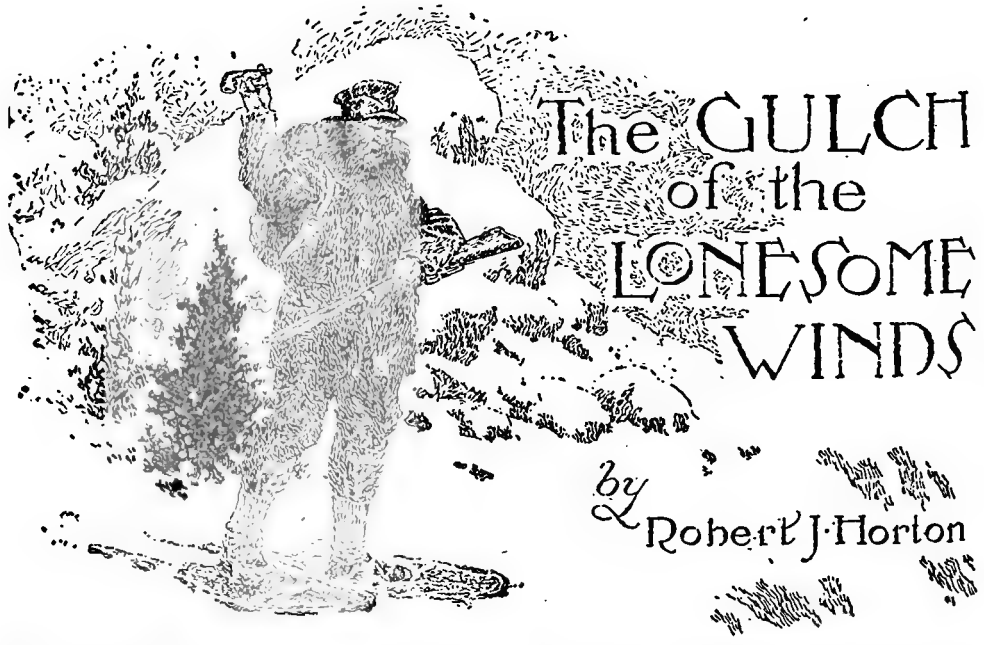
"It is not safe to believe you understand my theory until you have put it in practise on the board. It is like all precepts—like all religions—like honor; until you have turned theory into accomplishment you are not——"

"Not guilty!" said Monty. "Yes, I know. It's the same way with murder and revenge—not guilty till you've got your man. Well—you got yours. I'm sorry to say that Guthrie came to a miserable end. It was clever—deuced clever! Next time we meet I'll thank you to forget the short acquaintance! Are you fellows ready?"

"Now wouldn't that beat poker!" murmured Will, following the rest of us out—reluctantly, I think.

He wanted to stay and thrash the Chinaman.

Hi Ying Lang watched us leave the room and descend the narrow stairs with eyes that were gentle and magnanimous. His attitude, upright on the cushions, was of unassuming forgiveness and benevolence for all mankind.



The GULCH of the LONESOME WINDS

by Robert J. Horton

THERE is a point on the Hoover Creek trail, as it tops the divide between Band Creek and the Dry Fork, where the pines break away and edge down lower on the steep slopes and the rocks rear back in a half circle, clearing a space for a little wind-blown meadow that lies sheltered in the lap of the pass.

To the right, if one is facing the east, near the start of the eastern slope, there is a depression in an outcropping of granite, shaped like a huge bowl and fringed with cedar bushes—an ideal spot for a hunter to lie in ambush for game crossing the divide. The mountainsides below the rock-ribbed ridges are clothed in a growth of virgin pine and fir, with here and there tall spruces towering as forest sentinels.

On an afternoon in late Fall a man crouched in the natural spot of concealment on the pass and peered over the cedar bushes. He had a rifle across his knees. His manner was strained, anxious—his glance furtive but keen. Sinister determination radiated from his stealthy posture.

From his vantage point he had an excellent view of the trail in either direction and he scanned intently the white ribbon which marked its course through the pine growth. The snow was not deep and the wind had shaken clear the branches of the pines. It was cloudy and a fresh snowfall threatened.

To his right, on the eastern slope and less than fifty yards away, there was a sheer drop of some two hundred feet into

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a natural cistern, the sides of which were formed of fine shale. Prospectors, rarely venturing into that section of the Little Bear Mountains, called it the Sink Hole and avoided it, for once a man slipped into it he would emerge only through some kindly freak of fortune finding sound footing for him in the sliding shale.

Below the lower rim of the Sink Hole a narrow gulch led through a freakish formation of the mountain into a deep cañon that emerged upon the trail some distance away. Its sides were studded with an almost impenetrable growth of jack-pines and topped with jagged edges of rock so they looked—from the top of the divide—like two monstrous cross-cut saws, moldy at the bottom and rusted on the teeth, laid side by side with but little space between.

A stream, fed by springs near the shoulders of the Sink Hole, trickled through the gulch, and midway of its length, partly concealed by overhanging rocks and jack-pines, was a cabin.

Often during his attentive vigil the man on the divide would slip quietly to the edge of the Sink Hole and look down into the gulch. Then he would hurry back and take up his station in the granite bowl behind the cedar bushes.

It was evident that he was waiting for some one. He fingered his rifle nervously and frequently glanced at the sky, which was growing dark with the filling clouds of an approaching storm.

There were no tracks on the trail to the east in the direction of the cañon which led into the gulch. Neither were any tracks discernible on the trail to the west. But from the rear of the ambush tracks led off into the fastnesses of the western slope. The man had come from that direction. He had favored concealment.

In appearance he was an average man of the tall hills. Dark, with snappy black eyes, heavy brows and beard. His lips were thick and he kept them pressed tightly together as he strained his eyes along the trail to the east. He was of medium height, stoutly built, and clad in a mackinaw and cap, with blue overalls and rubber overshoes that buckled fast about high, thick socks. He wore no mittens and his hands were gnarled and scarred.

As the afternoon wore on and the storm gathered he became more and more impatient and lost much of his caution.

SUDDENLY he crouched back and stared fixedly at a point on the trail above the entrance to the cañon.

A man was plodding through an opening in the trees on his way to the top of the divide. Only a moment was he visible, and then the timber screened him from view.

That fleeting glimpse seemed to inspire the one who waited. He leaped to his feet and ran to the western end of the clearing, where he scanned the trail in that direction as far as he could see. Then, with the same nervous haste, he returned to his shelter and fixed his gaze upon the second clearing below.

When the oncomer reached it the watcher gave a stifled grunt of satisfaction.

The man approaching was now easily seen. He leaned far forward under the weight of a heavy pack-sack on his back. Now and again he stopped for a moment and hitched the pack higher on his shoulders so the strain would be fairly met. He had reached the steepest point on the trail. In another moment he again was screened from view by the pine growth.

The ambuscader looked quickly toward the west and then dropped upon one knee. He steadied his rifle and aimed at a point on the trail just above the pine growth at the eastern edge of the meadow.

A sudden gust of wind swept with wild ferocity through the pass, hurling before it a great, blinding mass of snow, which broke against the pines.

As the wind abated the man stepped into the clearing. The ambuscader's rifle leaped with a sharp report. The man whirled in his tracks, stood still for an instant and then plunged forward upon his face.

The other crashed through the cedar bushes and ran toward him. It had begun to snow. It was as if the elements had lent their sanction to the deed.

When he reached the figure in the snow he rolled it over with a quick action in order to unbuckle the pack-straps. As he did so he drew back suddenly with a startled exclamation. He looked hastily up and down the trail and then gazed long and earnestly into the face of his victim, a cryptic sneer partly curling his lips.

It was snowing hard now and the man seemed greatly pleased.

"Everything covered up in an hour," he muttered to himself, hurriedly unstrapping the heavy pack and removing it.

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He opened the dead man's coat and extracted a small gold pouch, a photograph and a letter. The letter was stamped and addressed for mailing, and he noted the superscription with another sneer.

He thrust the letter and pouch and picture into his pocket. Seizing the body by one arm, he dragged it to the edge of the Sink Hole, where he released it and watched it as it slid smoothly and silently to the bottom of the great shale pit.

WITH the pack which his victim had been carrying strapped to his own back, the man hurried along the trail down the eastern slope toward the cañon entrance to the gulch.

It was nearly dark, and he stumbled and slid, almost falling, as he ran across the open spaces in his haste. Occasionally he paused to look back and listen, but he heard no sound save the howling of the wind in the forest.

When he reached the entrance to the cañon he stopped to examine the trail which led on down into the valley. Apparently no one had been that way since the first hard snowfall. The tracks which he was following led into the cañon.

As he entered the cañon he noted again with satisfaction that the falling snow was fast obliterating the tracks made both by himself and the one who had recently passed along the same way.

The cañon was exceedingly narrow. At times he was compelled to wade the little stream flowing through it from the gulch. He did not look back now. He panted with the speed he maintained and the weight upon him. He carried his gun high on his shoulder, so that it rested on the pack. He swore frequently.

When at last he emerged from the cañon into the gulch he found a better trail. It was almost dark and snowing furiously, but he plunged ahead unheeding, increasing his pace until he fairly ran in the smoother places. The wind shrieked above him but the gulch was calm.

He came suddenly upon a little clump of trees and stopped. He could see the dark outlines of a cabin.

"That's the place all right," he whispered to himself.

It was quite dark when he approached the door. It was not locked and, lifting the latch, he entered stealthily.

The cabin was still warm and the coals left by its recent occupant glowed cheerfully when he opened the grate of the sheet iron stove. He dropped the pack upon the floor and struck a light. He found a lamp on the window shelf and lit it. Then he surveyed the cabin's interior.

The place was in order—neat and clean. There was a bunk in one corner, a rude table in another; shelves were built along the walls from the stove to the door on the opposite side from the bunk. The window was covered with a gunny sack. A ham, some bacon, a sack of flour and a bag containing other provisions were suspended from the log rafters by means of wires as a protection against the ravages of mountain-rats. There were newspapers, tobacco and pipes in the empty powder box nailed to the log wall above the table. The room had the comfortable appearance of having been occupied for some time and seemed to be liberally stocked with necessities.

"Good for all Winter," the man mused to himself. "Safe, out of the way, and a good placer creek to work on. It's here. I know it is. I'll make a big stake by Spring. My God, what a wind!"

High above, the winds howled and roared like a thousand furies loosed from some ethereal maelstrom. This was characteristic of the gulch.

Indian lore had it that one of the wind gods had died there and that his spirit wandered in the quiet atmosphere below while his children wailed their anguish among the rock jetties above. But there was a more practical reason. Because of its eccentric formation the region lent itself to these atmospheric disturbances, and the winds hurdling the divide, or rushing up the cañon far below, clashed there and waged battle for the right of way.

Thus, over the gulch below the Sink Hole, the winds always played; now sighing and moaning, and again roaring or shrieking with the velocity and tumult of a hurricane while the gulch lay becalmed.

When the man had finished his inspection he removed his coat; then he lifted the pack-sack to the bunk and opened it. He held it up and allowed a heavy buckskin sack to fall out of it. He trembled in feverish haste as he untied the strings of the sack and peered within. His eyes glistened. He went to the door and put the heavy bar

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that stood beside it in place. He put his ear to the latch and listened, but any sound must have been drowned in the roar of the winds.

For a long time he stood motionless and then returned to the bunk. He reached into the sack and, holding it open with one hand, let a stream of golden flakes flow through the fingers of the other.

"Some pay-dirt," he whispered.

Many times he reached into the sack to feel the gold in his hand and to watch it, fascinated, spellbound, awed, as it slipped through his swarthy fingers with its golden, glittering gleam.

At last he tied the sack and placed it on the boards of the bunk underneath the pallet at the head.

Next he went to his coat and withdrew the pouch, the letter and the photograph which he had taken from his victim. The pouch, too, was filled with gold-dust.

He turned his attention to the letter.

Twice he read it through, spelling it out carefully, word by word, his lips curling.

"Why, the poor —— fool! The poor —— fool!"

He gazed for a long time at the picture, and then he laughed a short ugly laugh.

He crumpled the letter and picture in his hand and, lifting the stove lid, held them over the coals. He hesitated. Finally he closed the lid and put the articles back in his pocket.

ALL that night the man paced back and forth in the little cabin. He stopped frequently at the door and listened and once he opened it and looked furtively outside. But it was like looking into an inky void. The storm continued unabated and throughout the long watches of the night the winds held carnival.

He replenished the fire with wood he found piled behind the stove and under the bunk. Toward morning he made some coffee in which he soaked biscuits yielded by a tin box on the shelves. He talked much to himself in a mumbling undertone, as men will when alone and occupied with strenuous thoughts.

With the first gray light of dawn he was out and on his way up the gulch. He took his rifle with him. It had stopped snowing.

Half-way between the cabin and the head of the cañon he came upon a crude sluice-box and in the ice-bound bed of the stream he saw evidences of the placer miner's hand.

"I knew it," he crooned. "Richer than all Billy-be-d——, too! I'll make a big clean-up here this Winter."

He grasped a pick which had been left against the supports of the sluice-box and broke the thin covering of ice. Bed rock was exposed. He broke the ice below the sluice-box and saw the gravel.

"Well, he got down this far, but I've got all the rest of the way to work this Winter. Water will be all gone in a week, too; but there must be springs here—behind the cabin probably."

Apparently satisfied with his discoveries, he continued up the gulch. As he neared the lower rim of the Sink Hole he became more wary. He left the trail for the cover of the jack-pines. He paused for long intervals and kept his eyes on the divide.

He skirted the rim of the Sink Hole until he reached a point where he could look down into the bottom of the pit from the shelter and screen of the trees. He saw a lump at the bottom of the hole; it might have been an oblong-shaped rock, or a log, but as it was covered with snow it was impossible to tell what it was.

"Might come a thaw, though," the man reasoned to himself in an undertone. "I'll put a shot of powder in those rocks up there and send some dirt down on top of it."

Then he made his way back to the cabin.

Before the day was done he had hidden the sack of gold under the floor and had tested the gravel in the creek bed.

That night he seemed much elated. He sat in a chair and dozed, mumbling to himself—always of the Spring and the clean-up. And with every little untoward sound he leaped to his feet and listened. He plainly was uneasy. And there were always the winds, sighing or screaming, as they rushed through the rock crevices which looked like the sharp teeth of a giant saw.

IN THE days that followed he worked like a demon from early dawn until night had draped its shades about the gulch. He went often to the top of the divide but never by way of the trail. On these excursions he picked his way stealthily through the jack-pines far to the left of the Sink Hole and gained the top of the precipitous ridge above the little meadow in the lap of the pass.

He washed out much gold. There were

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indications that the dirt was becoming richer down the creek, which was unusual. He finally decided that the increased values were due to a slight widening of the creek bottom and a better rock formation which held the gold particles in larger numbers.

Two weeks after his arrival in the gulch he went up on the ridge to the left of the Sink Hole, just at its edge, and put a stick of powder where it would precipitate a large quantity of rock and gravel into the pit when exploded.

He trained a short fuse on a branch of a cedar bush where he could easily touch a match to it. He stood watching it as it lay, a white piece of cord apparently, like an insulated wire which had been whitewashed. A match held against the white cord, a short run away—and a mass of earth and rock would be sent down upon the white lump in the bottom of the pit.

But he didn't fire the shot. He was afraid the sound of the blast might imbue some straggler or stray hunter with overzealous curiosity. In such event there might have to be two lumps in the snow down there. He didn't want two lumps. One was enough.

So he left the dynamite with the fuse reaching up to the cedar branch until another time. In case of emergency, perhaps—if any one should chance to come—or at night, or when the winds were unusually terrific and would drown the blast.

The snow was deep in the open places and hung in great gobs on the branches of the pines in the lower cañon and in the gulch. The trees on the ridges were kept clear by the winds, so that the gulch was topped with green and white below.

As weeks passed the man became more and more uneasy. Hard work during the hours of the day failed to provide the exhaustive fatigue which would dissipate the nervous strain under which he suffered. He slept but little. He held lengthy conversations with imaginary persons during the long nights. He listened for minutes at a time, gripping the edge of the bunk, and usually these spells ended when he leaped to his feet with a startled exclamation. He took to counting things—the rafters above, the logs in the wall, the tree tops seen through the window silhouetted against the moonlit sky.

During every hour of daylight he worked, and it was hard work. He was compelled to build fires to thaw out the gravel, and the smoke curling above the gulch to where it was caught in the vortex of the wind whirlpools bothered him. He was afraid to light his fires at night because they might be seen by some wanderer in that mountainous land of desolation.

He went more often to the top of the divide. He kept a path worn through the jack-pines to the left of the pit and up to the ridge. He was fortunate in that there were no drifts on that side.

The dynamite plant was undisturbed. The little white fuse cord lay on the cedar bush leaf, protected from snow by the thick branches above, sheltered from the winds by the high bluff behind, waiting till the man might choose to touch a match to it so that it could send its slumbering tons of rock and earth crashing into the Sink Hole.

The man's excursions to the top of the divide and the rock-bound fastnesses about the head of the gulch were not actuated entirely by the instinct of keeping watch or the lure of the snow-covered object at the bottom of the big pit.

The crevices in the rocks and the open spaces among the tree growth were spotted with little yellow heaps of earth left by his pick.

He was searching for a lead to the mother-lode.

Somewhere up there was a big deposit of gold from which the gold particles in the creek bottom had come. It would be a tremendously rich find if he could locate the lode from which the placer deposits had been washed.

So day after day he trudged about the head of the gulch, running a huge triangle of little prospect holes; digging now in the hard earth below the cliffs and again in the frozen roots under the snow and beneath the trees.

Many days he was compelled to remain indoors because of storms and on such days he figured on the margins of the old newspapers and estimated the extent and value of his treasure.

Once he tried to sing, but the song was short-lived. It seemed out of place. He did not attempt it again. Instead he took to brooding and for hours he would sit with his chin in his hands, staring at some insignificant object, playing a tattoo upon his temples with his finger tips.

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He came out of one of these spells screaming:

"I'm not your partner! You lie—you lie, —— you; I'm not your partner."

He shook a trembling fist toward the Sink Hole and as quickly became composed, listening—listening intently as the winds moaned mournfully in the twisted air lanes overhead.

THEN came the worst storm of the Winter. It was in the third week in December, and for three days it snowed and the winds blew a veritable hurricane.

The man stayed inside. He measured and remeasured, estimated and reestimated the contents of the buckskin bag, which was now almost full. He was restless—fearfully restless. He counted the letters in the old newspaper headlines. The figures he placed in long columns on a piece of wrapping paper and then wrathfully tore the strips into bits. His imaginary conversations became harsher in tone and he cursed frequently and fervently. He kept the heavy bar in place behind the door. His gun he stood conveniently near.

On the third night of the great storm the fury of the elements suddenly was spent and it turned clear and cold. The little thermometer outside the window of the cabin showed fifty degrees below zero.

The man lay upon the bunk in a half doze, watching through slitted lids the pink shadows of the moving branches of the pines playing against the snow. There was a full moon. The mountains were clothed in their Winter glory. A timber-wolf on a distant ridge pointed his nose to the star-flecked sky and howled the plaintive wail of his kind.

A dry pine-cone rattled against the roof; the shadows seemed to blend into one—menacing, leaning toward the window.

The man leaped for his gun.

"I'm not your partner," he screamed. "I didn't tell you to come here. I didn't know who you was up—up—up there. You didn't have to write to me; you didn't need to tell me to come; there wasn't enough for both of us; there wasn't enough!"

He stood trembling in the center of the cabin for several moments while the shadows outside separated as the branches overhead were whirled apart. He took the letter from his pocket—the letter which the dead man had written to him—and gave it to the coals in the stove.

"My partner, ——," he muttered. "Came here because they were all scared of the place. Came to make a clean-up."

He paused in the soliloquy as the winds broke loose again in a fiendish howl at the upper end of the gulch and swept screaming overhead to meet the charging counter currents from down the cañon.

"I'm going out tomorrow!" he exclaimed suddenly.

The decision steadied him. He laughed as the winds strove to drown his voice in a maelstrom of sound.

He went quickly about the work of getting things ready for his departure. He hefted and tested the weight of the buckskin sack, adding to the gold-dust which it had originally contained until he judged it to weigh about fifty pounds. He placed it in the packsack, raised it to his back and adjusted the straps.

"Fifteen thousand dollars worth in there if there's an ounce," he exulted.

He put the packsack under his bunk, near the head, where it would be handy against his departure in the morning. Then he put the balance of the gold-dust back in its hiding-place and examined the snow-shoes he found on pegs on the rear wall. He made some minor repairs and as he worked he talked rapidly to himself in a loud voice.

"All scared of the gulch. Said it was bad luck even to go into it; never get out—ha, ha, ha! Bad luck, bah—superstition, that's all. Bad luck for him—yes—the fool. Never get out? I'm going out—going out rich. An' in the Spring I'll come back and find the mother-lode and get the rest of this dust. The lode is there; I'll find it."

He listened again as stillness came with the subsiding winds. The silence was more disturbing than the tumult. His mood changed with the changes of the wind, apparently. His tones were softened:

"Bones—bones, they tell nothing; they prove nothing. That's what'll be left when the snow goes off—bones! I'll tell her he died of fever. I'll take the picture to prove it. I'll say he gave it to me and told me to come to her—ha, ha, ha!"

But it was not normal laughter.

"Afraid of the gulch! Why the poor

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fools! And all this gold waiting because a bunch of placer fools are afraid of an Indian superstition. Never get out if you stay over one night! Well I've stayed night and nights and I'm going out. Going out rich—rich—the fools. Ha, ha, ha! Rich—the fools——"

Dawn came. With the pack containing the buckskin sack upon his back the man prepared to leave the cabin. He was in an hilarious mood. His eyes shone strangely bright as he took a last survey of the cabin's dingy interior.

"Good-by," he said in a mocking voice. "They never get out—except me. I'm the bad spirit they talk about. I go and I come. Have a smoke before I go? Just one? On you? Why, sure."

HE PICKED up the pipe f the man who had occupied the cabin before he came—the man who had changed into the thing at the bottom of the Sink Hole. He packed it with the tobacco the man had left. He lit it and, taking his gun and the snow-shoes, went out the door. He was grinning.

He followed the trail through the jack-pines to the farther edge of the Sink Hole beneath the cliffs. Here he paused to adjust the snow-shoes before starting over the divide.

"I'm going out, fool," he called as he peered into the great shale rock hole. "In the Spring I'll come back and bury you and find the mother-lode. They never get out—except me!"

He knocked the fire from the pipe and hurled it below.

"There's your pipe!" he shrieked deliriously.

The little ball of burning tobacco fell upon the gray shredded leaf of a branch of cedar bush close to a thin white cord which looked like an insulated wire whitewashed. A thin line of smoke arose. A bit of the playing wind snuggled the glowing coal close against the white cord. The cord sputtered and smoked and dwindled, leaving a trail of white ash across the leaf.

The man stepped back from the edge of the chasm hunching the heavy pack of gold securely on his shoulders. His eyes, strangely bright, were lifted as he searched the top of the divide. He gave vent to a harsh laugh as he waved his hand in mocking courtesy toward the lump in the snow, now barely discernible at the bottom of the Sink Hole, and turned away.

Suddenly the earth rose about him. He felt himself lifted in the air as a thundering detonation hurled a bolt of crashing sound heavenward. The winds rushed in with a wild roar as a dark form, squirming, clawing, screaming, shot down the long slippery surface to the bottom of the pit amid a shower of earth and stones.

All day the winds played a weird, soft anthem o'er the gulch and died to a whisper as the sunset painted strips of red across the western sky, its last gleams slanting across a stiffened figure which lay as if asleep in the bottom of a deep pit, and which in appearance resembled the long, black shadow of a cross against the snow.

Higher on the mountain the fitful gleams of light caught the steady glitter of streaks of gold in the white quartz that held the mother lode, exposed by a blast which left a black blotch of earth and rock against the white sides of the Sink Hole.

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Author of "Salt of the Sea", "As a Man Is", etc.

FLEMING strolled contentedly up the main street of Levuka between the flamboyant trees that strewed the white road of al grit with scarlet blossoms and the e edge of the lagoon surf. There are o towns in the Fijis: Levuka, on the nd of Ovelau, the capital that was, and va, on the isle of Viti Levu—Great Fiji—capital that is. To these two comes all commerce of the group, and Fleming, ose tiny leasehold islet was nearer to vuka, was well satisfied to have placed vanilla crop at an average of three dol-s a pound. They called it twelve shil-gs and sixpence in Levuka, for the vernment and coinage are British.

Fleming had worked like a dog with that nilla plantation since he quit trading in ora, pearl and turtle-shell and in trepang. e big Australian firms with their capital d steamers had, as Fleming phrased it, nocked the tar out of the small trader."

Fleming had leased an island, sold his ooner, bought a sloop and set out vanilla. w he had a pound of dried beans for every tting of Mexican vanilla that he had inted three years before. He was twenty-ven thousand dollars to the good and his ntation was established.

Better than that to Fleming, who was fond of money and what money would ng as the next man, he had turned the laugh on the scoffers who had predicted failure. He had raised more than a third of the previous year's export of the bean, had put Fiji on the map as a factor in the vanilla market and had discovered, with a quiet but thorough sense of pride, that John Fleming, successful vanilla planter, was a man of vastly more importance than John Fleming, South Sea trader.

Serene in white linen and white shoes, in white silk shirt, white hose and white sombrero of bleached hala, he turned up a lane shady with cocopalm and breadfruit, making his way up-hill to the home of the Widow Starkey. When Phil Starkey, a little more drunk, a little more reckless than usual, had gone fishing with dynamite in the tiny bay of his tiny isle of Paruki and, just to show that the devil took care of his own, insisted on crimping the primer cap with his teeth, not many people had lamented his death. Not his native boys, whom he cursed and drove to the limit. They, with all Levuka and its neighborhood, were glad for Helen Starkey, even while they mourned in Fiji style with proper appreciation of the occasion if not of the departed. If the widow shared their feelings she gave no sign but had left the island for Levuka and decorously observed the conventions.

She had been a beauty, with her blond complexion and her slim figure, when she had

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come out from the States at the summons of handsome Phil Starkey. She was a beauty still, though older and quieter, living on a slender income, too proud, perhaps, to go back home after her matrimonial disaster. That was two years old and it was time, some said and others thought, that she wiped out the bitterness of failure by a second and happier marriage. Fleming was one of those who thought much along such lines but said little, save as his actions may have spoken.

He was a suitor, though whether he was favored none might say. Whatever the widow thought about a second venture she kept to herself. It looked as if she had determined upon being especially careful, particularly sure of the man. Fleming, feeling that he had proven himself, set up by his reception as a successful planter, had nerved himself to find out where he stood in the lists, for he knew that he was not the only one to aspire to possession of the widow's charms.

Nervousness, coupled with a desire to appear unwilted despite the tropical heat, made him walk leisurely. But his pulses quickened as he came in sight of the gaily variegated crotons that hedged the widow's home. Her dwelling was rather cabin than house, a bungalow of four rooms winged with wide verandas, set in a garden that was a riot of perfume, color and verdure. The leaves of the crotons and of the climbing vines aped the flowers in their hues; the odor of ihlang-ihlang, plumaria, tuberose and stephanotis was almost overpowering. But Fleming thought the setting just right for the widow's slender person, sure to be dressed in cool white. He figured her in the shade of the veranda, dainty, feminine, serving him citronade, listening to the tale of his victory. Her place was a little Eden, he fancied. And then he saw the snake.

Harper was a good-looking snake. Fleming did not deny that. But he knew more about Harper than a great many people, a good deal more than Fleming ever mentioned. Harper was tall and dark and his black hair was waving, close-trimmed to his well-shaped head. He was a good conversationalist and a clever flatterer. He had a blended suggestion of laziness and deviltry that a great many women found fascinating, and at heart he was a cold-blooded blackguard. Fleming knew the sort of things that went on aboard Harper's schooner between port and port and he had a strong belief that Harper had one woman in Sydney who believed herself to be his wife, and another in Honolulu, not to mention more elastic alliances in Tahiti and elsewhere. To see Harper lounging on the widow's veranda, very much at home, inhaling his cigaret and sipping a citronade, destroyed all of Fleming's hardly acquired equanimity. He wanted to kick the man out of the garden and read the widow a lecture on how to avoid snakes.

"And Harper's the kind that doesn't pack rattles," thought Fleming as he grimly advanced up the steps, Harper lying at ease in the long rattan chair and smiling up at him mockingly.

The widow looked a bit uncertainly from one to the other.

"You men know each other, don't you?" she asked.

"Yes," said Fleming.

"Beyond a doubt," said Harper. "A bit different from the last place we met, eh, Fleming?"

He managed to suggest an innuendo in the statement and Fleming felt himself flush as the widow looked at him. The last time he had met Harper Fleming had yanked out of a waterside dump a young cub of a planter's son whom Harper had been trimming at poker with the help of some unsavory friends. And now, by some damnable trick of look and tone, Harper had put the shoe on Fleming's foot.

"Doing fine with your vanilla, they tell me, Fleming," drawled Harper condescendingly. "They can't say you don't know beans now, old man."

He grinned as he noticed Fleming's hand shake when he took the glass the widow handed him. It was fun to bait Fleming, Harper thought, a bit dangerous but a lot of fun. He reacted beautifully.

Then the widow interfered. The evidently bad blood between her two guests she attributed partly to jealousy, and therefore it was not entirely unacceptable; but she liked Fleming and did not propose to have any of her callers made uncomfortable.

She liked Harper, too. He both attracted and repulsed her. She figured that any man who did attract her must have some good in him and vaguely wondered who was responsible for the bad, and whether the right sort of woman might not

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: kept it from materializing or could now eliminate it. And Harper was dedly good-looking. Fleming was well-ired enough, and physically he was not far from perfect; but he was, to use the age feminine vocabulary, not so dis-uished looking or so graceful or well-nered as Billy Harper.

She's had one good-looking scamp," ght Fleming bitterly. "Don't she w enough now to sheer off when she another?"

FIFTEEN minutes Fleming endured while Harper discussed pearls and the latest fashions he had seen Suva when the tourists came off the mer, describing them well enough to w compliments from the interested wid-

Fleming was entirely out of it, sipping rink that seemed too sour, though it e out of the same jug as that of the rs, and resolving to have a private versation with Harper and tell him to clear of the Starkey bungalow—and realizing that a man in love can not nany things without giving rise to sus-on, slander and surveillance.

rom time to time Harper glanced at with deliberate malice and every the muscles in Fleming's body taut-l and his jaws clamped down, all of h seemed to cause Harper exquisite sement. At last the latter got up.

I have got to go," he said in a voice that ested he was literally tearing himself y. "Got to catch the ebb. I'm sailing afternoon. I shall hope to see you n soon, Mrs. Starkey. Now I'll leave and Fleming to talk of less frivolous ters."

You have been a godsend," said the ow with a light laugh as she got up and t with her visitor as far as the gate, nce he departed with a spray of ste-notis in his buttonhole and the air of accepted gallant.

he widow came back to the veranda Fleming stood to meet her with a ntly conscious air and a heightened color. knowledge that Fleming was in love her gave the lady a proprietary feeling manner, which she used in anticipating remarks that he might make.

Captain Harper has been here on busi-s," she said. "I feel that I have done e a good stroke."

Fleming, who had been choking down many emotions for many minutes, made an ass of himself.

"Then you'd better tell me what it is," he growled, "for I'll bet it's as crooked as a dog's hind leg."

"My end of it, or Captain Harper's?" she asked with an acid sweetness that should have warned Fleming.

"His."

"I thought men didn't knock each other," she went on.

Fleming got crimson under his tan.

"I'm warning, not knocking," he blurted.

"Have you any proofs that Captain Harper is crooked?" she asked.

Fleming pondered for a minute or two.

"None that I could offer," he said finally.

"Ah!"

She didn't say "I thought so," but the "Ah!" was more illuminating, scorching indeed. Fleming got up to go. It was getting altogether too hot for him. The scent from the garden choked him; the blossoms were too vivid. He itched all over with a pricking sensation.

"Have you got to catch the ebb too?" she asked.

"I have business to attend to," he said.

"Don't let me detain you."

She saw by his hurt face that she had gone farther than she intended. And she had not yet made her point.

"Captain Harper has taken the lease of the island off my hands," she said. "It is very satisfactory. It was only twenty-five pounds a year, but I am very thankful. That was the business he came about."

Here was Fleming's opportunity, an explanation, almost an apology, certainly an opening. But his eyes narrowed. What game was Harper up to now? The island that the late but not lamented Starkey had leased from the government for ten years, and for seven years unexpired rent of which the widow was responsible under the lease, was not good for anything. Starkey had tried to plant coffee and then started a tea plantation, but the soil and Starkey's methods were both poor. He had got out the pearlshell from the shallower spots of the lagoon and found even that of poor quality without a pint of baroques or seeds in the whole lot.

And now Harper was pledging himself to spend one hundred and seventy-five pounds—eight hundred and seventy-five

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dollars—on a barren islet. Was it for the widow's favor? That, Fleming was positive, would only be bestowed in a manner too honorable for Harper to understand, desire or, considering other alliances, be able to respond to. What was he up to? There was a joker somewhere. Harper wasn't spending nearly a thousand dollars for philanthropy or for the mere pleasure of citronade and cigarets on Helen Starkey's veranda.

"What's the idea?" asked the widow. "Don't you approve?"

"No, I don't," he answered, flatly and foolishly.

"Why not?"

He was dumb.

"You men are all alike," she flung at him.

He guessed what she meant. He was jealous, and his jealousy had tinged his judgment. But he was no pincushion, and he considered he had been pricked sufficiently.

"If it's a check he's given you," he said, "or even bank-notes, I'd advise you to change 'em."

"Thank you. And now you'll have to excuse me. Captain Harper came early and I haven't even touched my housework. If you'll wait and make yourself comfortable?"

It was the last straw. The housework put aside for Harper, but Fleming could sit around like a house cat waiting to be noticed!

"Thanks," he said. "But I'm busy too. I just dropped in."

She smiled at him as she gave him her cool, slim hand, and he interpreted it as a laugh. He had been idiotic. The widow's house was too far out of the way for any visit not to be purposeful. He strode down the garden, unaccompanied, undecorated with stephanotis. The widow had disappeared inside before he reached the crotons. Fleming went on down the hill with clenched fists, clenched for Harper, aching for a chance to use them. He saw a trim, white whale-boat shoot out from the wharf, the four native boys stroking beautifully, Harper in the stern with the steering-oar, graceful as a gondolier, the boat speeding out to the *Manuwai*—Sea-bird—Harper's schooner, sweet-lined, seaworthy and the fastest thing under canvas in the Fijis.

Fleming stood for a minute or two and mopped his forehead, noting the precision of the rowing, the snappy way in whic the oars were tossed up at the schooner side while Harper stepped on deck, th quick attachment to the falls and the u sway of the tender. When he reached th beach the *Manuwai* had up-anchored an under jib, stay and mainsail was slidin out on a reaching tack through the re channel, held up against wind and curre by Harper at the wheel, using perfe judgment. Once more he watched with swift envy a sweeping return of his love f the open sea and a slanting deck, regre for his own sold schooner *Tamotu*. Ou side the reef Harper's boys raced to shee and halyards. Up went the foresail, th kite topsails slipped up without a hitc setting precisely. Splintering the crisp bl seas beneath her forefoot, the *Manuw* with started sheets seethed westward.

"He's all a sailor, —— him!" said Fle ing, and he mopped his face again and we on to complete preparations for the shi ment of his vanilla.

But the joy of success had died. I grave lay up in the widow's garden. H hadn't even told her about his victor Probably she wouldn't care to hear abo it. And he wasn't going to take the chan of getting snubbed.

The widow had dismissed all the nativ help from the island enterprise when h husband died, paying them their bac wages out of what little was salvaged fro Phil Starkey's handling of affairs. On man had remained as a sort of caretak without wages, staying on the island at h own request. This was a Fijian name Tumba, an ancient, with eyes reddened b much drinking of *yanggona*—kava—an memories that led back to times when th week was considered wasted that did no see human flesh served at one meal a least.

COMING out from a merchant hot and smelly warehouse-offic Fleming saw Tumba, drunk, n with *yanggona*, which paralyzes the limb but with trade gin. His red-rimmed ey were murderous, shifty. He was dress only in a red *sulu*—kilt—and he swagger down the sand, his old but still efficien muscles bunching as he swung his arm and moved his shoulders, chanting in Fijia

"Eh, but I am hungry! I want to eat a ma

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He lacked only a club to look the cannibal. But he had no weapon and nobody took any notice of him. If he left the beach and annoyed any one, he would be arrested by the member of the native constabulary who stood eyeing him tolerantly. But the sun and the gin would probably put him to sleep in the shade and Tumba was allowed the uneven tenor of his way. Fleming recognized him and wondered where he had got the money to buy the gin. Harper must have dismissed him and given him a gift. But Harper had only just acquired the lease. Had he presupposed the widow's acquiescence in the deal?

It was like his infernal impudence, thought Fleming, to do a thing like that. And he had turned off Tumba because the man was too old. Fleming called to the drunkard—

"Hi, there, you Tumba, you come along here!"

Tumba stood and stared. His rheumy eyes saw nothing but some vision of memory. Perhaps he really believed what he was chanting, his youth mockingly restored by the gin. Who was this white man who called? Tumba was his own master! He had money yet to spend after this drunk had worn off! *Tchah!*

"Eh, but I am hungry! I want to eat a man!"

Fleming let him go. There was nothing to be got out of him. Tumba might have left the little island of his own accord. There was nothing to keep him there. Fleming forgot him, worrying about some new machinery that seemed missing but which turned up at last and was shipped on his sloop, crowding cabin and cockpit.

It was the third morning before he sailed out of the harbor and started for his own holding of Tamotu—named after his schooner appropriately, for *ta motu* can mean "the ship" or "the island." His sloop was called *Lelemotu*, which means "the little ship." It sailed well enough but had no great speed. Good enough for a planter, thought Fleming, regretful always of his well-found schooner that had once sailed the western archipelagos. All he wanted now was a vessel big enough to convey a couple of tons of beans and some provisions back and forth. He had only one man with him, a Tanna man from the New Hebrides, a black and ugly looking savage, but faithful, courageous, indebted to Fleming for his life when the latter had picked him up off the Tanna beach in the face of the arrow-fire of a hill tribe bent upon making *boloko*—human meat—out of Ngiki.

Ngiki swam like a fish and sailed by instinct. He was as good a man aboard, save for navigation, as Fleming himself. Strong as an ox and cheerful, he was the prize of all the Tanna men who helped to plant and train and weed Fleming's vanilla. The fertilizing and the scalding and the sweating in the sun Fleming attended to himself. It was a little too much, with the necessity of constant overseeing of the men.

He had hoped—Fleming sighed a little and frowned a little as he thought of his aspirations—that he could have got a partner to fertilize the flowers. A light-handed partner, with the deftness for the pinch and the touch with the toothpick that was all the work demanded in the early morning hours of coolness. The widow—but that was over, and Fleming steered the *Lelemotu* between spoke and spoke while Ngiki sprawled out forward in the full blaze of the sun like a lizard, sleek with coconut oil against blistering.

He was breaking in a new pipe, his tobacco box of brass stuck into the lobe of his left ear, stretched into a loop by such usage, the right lobe decorated with a small round vanity-mirror of which Ngiki was inordinately proud, using it as much as any haughty beauty of the gentler sex.

East of Ovalau the Fijis break up into scores of islets circling about the Koro Sea. Some are volcanic, most of coral formation. Many are uninhabited, visited only by some wandering schooner, blown out of its course perhaps, looking for fresh water or drinking nuts. Fleming had picked his own leasehold of Tamotu because it had water and a mountain peak that formed its core and mothered two sheltered valleys where the heat was tempered, and that by its trends thwarted the havoc of the occasional hurricanes.

The sloop took it easily, the wind holding steady, sailing on between blue and blue, the cobalt of the sky and the ultramarine of the sea with its indigo shadows. The distant islands and the mainlands showed as humps and juts of deeper blue than the horizon, with there here and there a faint gleam of green, palwise. There was neither fleck of foam nor of cloud. The *Lelemotu* slapped along nicely, the water

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chuck-chuckling to the shouldering thrust of her bows and hissing away astern with the delightful suggestion of coolness in the sound of aerated water. Ngiki finished his pipe, knocked out the ashes, cursing softly at the bite of the applewood, and went to sleep like a black cat. Fleming drowsed. He knew every fathom of the way by instinct, every shoaling of the bottom where coral atolls were slowly growing up to the surface, showing as patches of discoloration more or less distinct, according to wind and tide and submersion. The sloop almost knew its own way home. Fleming, knowing the feel of breeze and current and what the sloop could do, could have guessed his position within a quarter of a mile. He was on a long tack. With luck he would fetch Tamotu without shifting, somewhere about midnight.

Ngiki's flattened nostrils twitched in his sleep as a dog's will twitch. The Tanna-man had the full sense of smell that in most of us has atrophied so that it no more answers the purpose for which it is intended than do the eyes of an astigmatic person. When Ngiki's eyes were closed his ears and nose played sentinel, together with his sense of touch. What disturbed him now was only a hint, the suggestion of something unpleasant, not strong enough to set up the correlation between sensitory nerve and memory cell. It wasn't strong enough to mean anything to him yet. Fleming knew nothing of it at all, though he was still awake.

The sloop was sailing close-hauled on the starboard tack and the odor was wafted over the port bow. They were heading up to it and at the same time falling off in leeway. But it got stronger. Ngiki sat up and snuffed disgustedly, angry at being awakened. Then the white man got it. Both of them knew instantly what it was.

There are several smells in the South Seas that, once inhaled, are never forgotten. The smell of a dead whale to windward, the reek of sugar in the hold, that will permeate even the shell of a hard-boiled egg, the stink of guano and—and this would make a glue factory fragrant by comparison—the stench of rotting-out pearl-shell. It will travel down the wind for miles and salute a vessel leagues away, far out of sight of the offending beach. It gets into the hair, the clothes, tobacco, food, water, everything but an unopened cocoanut—and that must be swallowed instanter or tainted. It is thick and it is sticky.

"Wah!"

Ngiki spat overside. Then he looked expectantly along the deck to the cockpit, hoping that Fleming would tack, even if they did get home later. They might criss-cross that stinking lane instead of sailing almost straight up it, as they were doing.

"Faugh!"

Fleming's face exhibited disgust fighting with curiosity. He stood up and gazed around him to the blue humps and specks of far and distant land, each of which he knew by name, and approximated their distance.

"No good that smell, *saka* (sir)," said Ngiki. "Too much big fellow stink. Better we make um tack?"

Fleming shook his head.

"You take wheel, Ngiki," he said and dived into the cabin when the Tanna man came aft.

He came out with a chart that he had compiled himself in his trading days and added to from time to time. He cocked his eyes at the angle of the sun, made a brief calculation and chucked the chart down on to the transom cushions.

"All right, Ngiki," he said. "We come about."

THE one jib was self-working, on a club-boom. Ngiki took in the main-sheet smartly and hitched it once about the cleat, looking to his master to see if the sail was too taut or too slack. Fleming nodded and Ngiki completed his hitch.

For a moment Ngiki was happy. Then he sensed the reason for the tack. They were to head well to windward to offset leeway when they came back once again to close-hauled sailing. For the time they would be only on the edge of the smell, but they would work back into it, nosing along it as a hound on a trail. When Fleming once more gave him the wheel and again went below Ngiki grumbled aloud and to himself.

"What name (why) Falemingi go along that big-fellow smell? My word; it make my belly too much walk about. Spoil smoke."

He eyed Fleming curiously when the latter emerged on deck with a Colt automatic, carefully cleaned and oiled it, filled

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the clip after one cartridge had been injected into the breech, filled up two extra clips and tucked them away in his hip pocket.

Ngiki's eyes held anticipation and lust of battle. Through the reek of the rotting shell his mind smelled blood. It was a long time since Falemingi had been in action, a long time since Ngiki, in the too peaceful plantation life, had smelled powder. He did not know whether he would be in on the fighting or not, but the sight of the automatic, a murderous, heavy .44, was as the sight of a shotgun in the Fall to a setter.

Fleming put the pistol away in a holster attached to his belt and sat through the tack with his eyes half-closed, thinking.

Some one was rotting pearl on Paruki. Paruki now belonged, under its lease, to Harper. But the lease was exchanged only three days ago, and this shell had taken time to be brought up by the divers and laid on the drying-beaches. Starkey had tried the lagoon with poor results, but Fleming remembered that Starkey, characteristically, had worked only the shallows.

The deeper stretches might have panned out rich in shell and actual gems. People didn't rot out without some prospects of success. Harper wouldn't. And this must be Harper. If so, he had practically stolen the shell before he saw the widow. If she had refused to let the lease go Harper would have been in the position of a thief. Not that that would have worried Harper overmuch. It was not the first time he had been suspected or accused of crookedness. He would wriggle out of it some way with the pearls if he was given half a chance.

Tumba? Tumba's presence on Ovalau was better explained now. The diving and spreading had started the moment Harper left the island with Tumba aboard. Tumba could not be trusted. He might spill the news at any time. So he was removed befor operations began. Fleming did not think there were any natives on Paruki, outside of Harper's crew, who were Malaita boys and not divers. Harper used modern methods for getting his shell, a diving-suit with an oxygen tank, a quick clean-up and away.

That was his style, whether he held a lease and was on the windy side of the law or was pirating a lagoon. It took white men to use a suit. The natives didn't like it. There were probably four or five white men on Paruki, aside from the Solomon Islanders from Malaita.

It was big odds and necessitated careful plans, but Fleming did not hesitate. He was not going to see the widow robbed and he intended to show up Harper. The memory of that quarter of an hour on the widow's veranda still rankled. He leaned against the weather stays, his big, athletic body pliant to the pitch and toss of the ship.

The breeze was freshening a bit and the sloop was making good time reaching. Fleming's eyes were half closed but Ngiki caught the gray gleam that shone from them, noted the vertical lines between the brows, the bossing jaw muscles, and nodded and winked to himself.

"By and by big fellow trouble he walk along," he murmured happily.

" 'Tend sheets, Ngiki; we're going about!" said Fleming suddenly.

Ngiki jumped and Fleming spun the wheel. Up came the sloop, catching the wind in flattened main and staysail-jib, tossed her bows and dug into the seas, plowing on to Paruki, into the heart of the stench. Fleming got his binoculars and kept them focused for the first sight of the island peak.

Paruki boasted one cone, sloping abruptly down on one side, its ridges largely barren, denuded of soil and vegetation. Much of the islet was marsh and the lagoon bit deeply into it, fringed by mangroves. On the northern side there were steep cliffs, part of the lone mount. The water came up close to them and landing was difficult. The cliffs mounted in sheer *palis*—precipices—to the serrated summit of the cone, and then the land pitched down toward the lagoon and the leeward beaches, broad stretches of sand where the shell was rotting.

Fleming knew that even if there were men on the lookout by purpose or accident he could sight the loom of the peak before they caught a glimpse of his sail, unless there was some one on the cone, which was most improbable—and had to be chanced. He intended to effect a landing and make at least a reconnaissance before sunset. Much of the pith of his plan depended upon circumstances.

But something had to be done before the shells were stripped and a clean-up of the pearls effected. And done without warning. Pearls were easy things to hide, hard

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to identify. A little while and no one could prove the rotting had not taken place within the term of the transferred lease. The fact that Harper had troubled to get the lease at all and to pay for it was to Fleming proof positive that the haul was likely to be so rich that Harper, discovering how the shell was running, resolved to cover himself in case of future trouble. If the news ever leaked out that he had pirated a widow's lease the Government would be after him hot foot. But he knew what he was handling before he put up his eight hundred and seventy-five dollars.

The peak of Paruki swam into view on the lenses of the binoculars like a stain on a microscopic slide. It assumed form, the shape of a double-tooth turned roots up for exhibition purposes. It was right in the wind's eye and from it poured the cloggy smell. To get to windward of it unseen, Fleming had to slant off on a long leg and fetch up to position on another. The latter would probably have to be broken into several tacks. But there was plenty of time and the wind blew steady and true. So the sloop leaned from the breeze instead of on it and went scooting off, long before any one on the leeside Paruki could have caught sight of the tinest fleck of canvas.

It was two hours to sunset when Fleming slipped overboard into the trailing tender and gave Ngiki his last instructions. On a lee shore, with the waves beating on the lava buttresses, Fleming dared not anchor. He took risk enough with his dingey, for the water went licking and spouting up the cliffs and roaring among the boulders and caves in a fashion far from inviting. But he could trust Ngiki to handle the sloop, to sail off and on until he came back again. And, if anything went wrong, to wing it back to Levuka and present the letter Fleming had written and left in the cabin to the merchant to whom Fleming had sold his vanilla. But not to leave until noon the next day and to keep his eyes and ears wide open for Fleming's coming.

"I may be in a big fellow hurry when I show up," said Fleming and Ngiki grinned appreciatively.

AT THE last moment a treacherous undertow combined with a following wave and slammed the dingey down so hard upon a slab of lava that it smashed its bottom strakes and broke its keel. Fleming leaped as it struck and fought through the yeast of sucking water, clinging to a buttress of the cliff until the sea reluctantly subsided and left him free for another rush, a leap across a split and a swift wading, waist-deep, to the gully he had picked out from the sloop as the best chance of ascent.

To a man whose head never dizzied and whose rubber-soled feet never slipped the climb was a little better than possible. Fleming was all in when he got to the top and flung himself panting but safe upon a ledge just below a gap between two of the fanged roots of the peak. The sun was getting low back of him and the shadow of the cone spread out over Paruki like a violet veil. In the horse-shoe lagoon swam Harper's schooner, the *Manuwai*, at anchor. Her canvas was furled and he could see black figures making her shipshape, shining brasses and whitening decks. Three or four more natives were spreading out a pile of shell, handling it with five-tined forks, standing to windward for what small protection that would give them from the reek.

Fleming stood up, getting his wind. He saw a weird figure emerge from the lagoon, goggle-eyed, humpbacked beneath the oxygen tank—one of Harper's divers. Harper himself, he fancied, though all the figures were miniature, strolled down to meet the man. Behind the lagoon was the marsh through which a stream ran sluggishly. Back of the marsh the bush, and in the bush a clearing with a tiny bungalow, a wooden-walled, corrugated-iron-roofed house of two rooms with a lean-to at the back of the kitchen. Smoke came out of the roof of the lean-to. Fleming heaved a sigh of relief. The smoke meant that Harper and his companions ate ashore, probably slept there, playing cards during the evenings, smoking and drinking.

He started down, keeping to cover as best he could until he reached the bush, where concealment was easy. He had about fifteen minutes of actual daylight left when he came out of the bush to what had once been a garden of yams, *taro*, cane and corn. With the sinking of the sun darkness would be almost instantaneous, lasting until the stars got their power. There was no moon.

Creeping through the rank growths, Fleming heard a laugh from the house,

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followed by another and another. There was the clink of glasses, the scent of tobacco stealing out to him as he advanced close to the lean-to, the smell of frying meat and the rattle of pots and pans. He crouched in the angle between lean-to and house, listening.

The outer door opened and he heard the tread of men on the veranda and their voices greeting those already in the room. There was a window whose sill he could have peered over by straightening, but he was not yet ready. The newcomers were the diver and Harper.

"Termorrer I lays off," said the diver. "I put in too much time today and the ledge is gittin' deeper. All the best-lookin' shell's comin' up from eighteen fathom. I ain't goin' to git the bends stickin' down too long. Termorrer I lays off, pearls or no pearls. We got all the time in the world, now you've fixed up the lease."

"We can finish up washing shell," suggested Harper. "The place stunk to heaven when I was coming up in the schooner. It's lucky the island's out of the way or some nosy fool would have been rubbering before we got the lease. It came easy though. She fell for the parlor stuff. But it's just as well to clean up."

Fleming appreciated the backhand slap at himself with a grin but Harper's depreciation of the widow sent his hand to the butt of his automatic.

"Pretty soft for you," said a fresh voice. "You playin' the beau to a pritty woman an' then kickin' about the stink of the stuff comin' up. —— your hide, we live in it. I vote for the clean-up. And next time I go pearlin' I pick 'em out while they're alive. The shell can go to blazes when we got a line of pearls like we been findin'. Pickin' through the meat today, I even forgot the stink the way they stacked up. One out of every sixth shell, so help me Jimmy. No seeds. They're old stock. —— few baroques. Tim got one beauty. I'll bet this lagoon is virgin. Want to see what we got?"

"Let's eat first," suggested Harper.

"An' for —— sake pass the bottle," chimed in the diver. "Stayin' down's dry work. Hurry up the chuck, Fred!" he called out to the man in the lean-to.

It grew darker. The cook in the shed took in the meal, and the men scuffed their chairs about the table and all fell to with an appetite that Fleming shared but could not relish. The cook was on equal terms with the rest, and that helped. He wanted to have them altogether. Not a Malaitan likely to tackle him in the rear. The native boys were evidently down on the beach or aboard. A lamp was lit. The bottom of the window-sash was up and covered with mosquito-netting. The great leaves of a banana, A-shaped in its length, pendent from the central rib, pressed against and across the netting, admirable screens for Fleming if . . . .

He felt his way through the growth noiselessly, carefully, one hand on the boards of the lean-to, which had a window on the other side, through which he peered. Then he kicked his shin against what he was looking for and picked it up, a wooden packing-box of fairly stout construction. He set this against the wall of the house under the window and stood upon it with his head tucked into the inverted V of the nearest banana banner, waving gently, like its fellows, in the land wind. Its long edges were split here and there and through these tatters, perfectly masked, Fleming looked into the room.

There were four men there besides Harper and he knew all but one of them. One was Harper's regular mate; another his supercargo. The fourth was a Suva scallawag and the fifth matched him. They were a hardbitten, reckless lot, hawk-nosed, save for the supercargo, who had had his flattened in a forgotten fight. Harper alone showed any neatness, any attempt at ordinary cleanliness. Two wore beards of ancient growth; two more had not shaved for days. And their faces were inflamed with gross appetites long indulged, as they ate, save for Harper, like a litter of pigs at a trough.

They drank and they boasted and they told rotten stories, and Fleming kept *doggo*, waiting his time.

At last the dishes were shoved to one side and Harper and his mate got up. Harper took down a metal box from a shelf and unlocked it. The mate took a bag of chamois leather from inside his shirt. Harper set the box on the table unopened but the mate poured from the chamois bag on to the wood a pattering rain of pearls, highlighted in iridescent beauty by the lamp, sheeny soft in the shadow.

Fleming puckered his lips in a silent whistle. Surely such pearls had come

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from a virgin patch. He knew pearls, and there were one or two of the larger of these gems, being handled by grimy, callused fingers, that were worth a cool thousand apiece, traders' prices. Pearls before swine, he thought, as the gleaming globules passed from hand to hand, roughly appraised.

"A GOOD lot," said Harper. "With what there is here in the box, boys, we've got fifty thousand dollars in plain sight. There ought to be twenty thousand more in what's left of the shell on the beach, to say nothing of what we'll bring up. Then there's the shell. Call it a hundred thousand dollars and you're below the mark rather than above it."

"Twenty thou' apiece," said the mate. "And each of us four to give Harper ten per cent. of our even shares for swingin' the thing, harpoonin' the widder inter shiftin' the lease, an' the use of the schooner. Not so bad!"

Fleming hunched his shoulders, his body tensing for action. But the stage was not quite set to his liking.

"Fair enough," said another, the scallawag from Suva, known to Fleming as "Bush" Dickson. "Fa-a-ir enough. How about that —— Kanaka, Banjo, or Tambo, or whatever his name was? S'pose he squeals that we pulled this thing 'fore we had the right. They're kind of techy down Suva way 'bout the protection of their leases."

"You haven't got rid of the Suva jail itch yet, Bush," said Harper, and the rest laughed at the pointed jest while Dickson grinned stupidly. "Don't you worry about Tumba. I've fixed it so that Tumba draws a little money each week—only for a week or two, but he don't know that—from Mike Larned, who runs the Ambergris Hotel and don't mind selling booze to Kanakas. I told Tumba it was a sort of pension from the widow. The point is that he has to go to Larned's to get the cash—it's seven dollars a week and Mike is to give him a dollar a day. Mike is going to see that Tumba keeps drunk into the bargain. That's an easy job so long as he shows Tumba the bottle. After two weeks, if Tumba says anything, they'll think he dreamed it. They won't believe him on dates; a Kanaka's word don't go far anyhow. So don't worry about Tumba."

"Some fox, our skipper, I'll say," said Dickson. "Let's see the rest of them pearls."

Harper assented without demur. It seemed to be a party agreement that the pearls were to be kept in plain sight and inspected upon request of any member of the gang, like the books of a stock corporation. The supercargo scooped up the loose pearls and put them into a small wooden calabash. Harper took another chamois bag from the box, and a small canvas sack.

"Baroques here," he said, tapping the canvas poke.

Then he added the contents of the chamois bag to the pearls in the bowl. The glistening heap pyramided above the rim. Fleming inched his head along the inverted trough of the banana leaf, drawing his gun from the holster. There was just one other thing. . . .

"That the agreement with the widder?" asked the diver, reaching for a paper. "I ain't seen that afore. How's it go?"

Harper took the document and unfolded it under the lamp. He parted his lips for speech but none ever left them.

"Hands up, the bunch of you! Ten hands! Fifty fingers! Up! And high! Up!"

Fleming was lolling in the window, his automatic shifting steadily in an arc that covered all the five.

"Get back into that corner!" he said. "Line up! That's the idea. Good evening, Harper. And keep on trying to touch the roof or you'll be scratching dirt. I mean business, you pack of thieving hounds."

Fleming was ready to shoot if need be, and they knew it. Nothing less would have kept them passive as Fleming set a knee across the sill and eased himself into the room, his gun-barrel never wavering. Their eyes glared like those of suddenly thwarted devils as he slid into his pocket the lease transfer and emptied the calabash of its pearls with one hand into his bandanna handkerchief, which he then placed in his pocket. The gums and teeth of the quintet were drawn back in wolf-snarls as Fleming backed up to the window and eased out on to his box. He had ripped away the rotten netting without a sound before he made his appearance. Once more he lolled across the sill.

"Good night, Harper," he said.

"I'll cut your heart out," said Harper,

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his words bitter with venom, "if I have to trail you from here to Madagascar."

"Try Levuka first, Harper," said Fleming smiling. "More likely to find me there—or on Tamotu."

He jumped lightly from his stand, turned and raced through the dark, deserted garden. Behind him the room broke into an uproar. From the window came a volley of pistol shots, the bullets tearing through the leaves and stalks as Fleming, head down, broke for the bush. He could hear the five swearing among themselves.

"He's making for the mountain, —— him!"

"Goin' to circle round to the beach!"

"Where's his —— boat?"

The blundering crash of pursuit sounded in Fleming's rear. Then some one—Harper by the voice—yelled for the Malaitan boys. And then there was silence, save for the noise of Fleming's own going.

But he knew that Harper had done the right thing, had set the Malaitan boys, swift and sure as bloodhounds, on his trail. He came to the edge of the bush, where it broke up into clumps before it faded away on the hard lava of the mountain ridges. Between two of these clumps he darted and instantly a red flare stabbed the dark and a bullet went singing high and to the left.

"That is a Malaitan," Fleming decided. "They're bum shots; that's one blessing. Rifle, at that!"

His guess was proven as the man who had fired at him let out a loud "*Eyah-a-ah!*" giving tongue like a dog. And like a fox Fleming went up the cone in the dark, helped by the starlight, but keeping in the shadows wherever cleft or gully offered.

The gap showed above him, a cluster of stars caught in its deep cup. Then the stars were blotted out by the swift, silent passage of a shadowy, silhouetted figure—a native, naked save for a *sulu* cloth, bearing a rifle. The Malaitans, guessing his exit or knowing it the only one, had outstripped him on the trail and cut him off, barring him until the white men caught up.

Fleming's breath was short, his heart pounding and his lungs panting from the burst he had maintained all the way up the steep slopes. The figure had passed, merging into some rock crevice before Fleming could aim and fire.

Back of him sounded a tinkle, the fall of a scrap of weathered obsidian dislodged by a naked foot to a ledge of lava. Fleming was sandwiched. He turned to the side-wall of the cleft, feeling for a niche, hooking his fingers into it and muscling himself up until his rubbered toes caught a hold. He remembered having seen the suggestion of a ledge on this side of the pass when he had come through, and now he was forced to take the desperate chance, also to risk a fall of rock like that which had betrayed the man back of him, who even now was stealing along hoping to catch glimpses or sound or smell of Fleming.

Fleming found his ledge and crabbed along it till the sea-wind blew on his face, turned to the rock. He knew he had reached the mouth of the gap. With infinite care he faced about, fingered for and found a clutch and gazed down. Fifteen feet below him, in the saddle of the pass, his black body merged with the cliff, his head thrust forward, peering, listening, sniffing for the first sign of the fugitive white man, was a Malaitan, still as if hewn out of the solid rock. The glint of starlight on his rifle barrel first betrayed him. Inch by inch Fleming stooped and then literally swooped down upon the man, lighting on him in the perilous footing of the pass, landing between the man's shoulders and smiting with the heavy automatic. The end of the muzzle jarred against the savage's tough, thick skull behind the ear and he passed out of any control of sense or muscle.

Below, Fleming saw the sloop coming up on an inshore tack. Apparently Ngiki had heard the sound of firing. The vessel was little more than a shadow, save for the streaks of sea-fire that made up her wake. Down the steep declivity Fleming slid and leaped, expecting every moment to find himself targeted. But he was close to the bottom before a gun was fired, and that at random, for he could not be well seen from above. But presently he would be a shining mark as he swam off to the sloop. To say nothing of the sharks. A bullet thudded and flattened on the rock ledge at his feet as he ran out from the cliff face, shouting to Ngiki, thankful that the tide was at flood because of the depth it would give him for the dive, and took a header into the heart of a high comber streaked with phosphor.

Bullets spattered about him as his head

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came clear and he struck out hand-over-hand for the sloop. Ngiki called to him:

"Look out for s'ark! Rope at stern."

He saw the line trailing and made for it as the sloop lunged past. The flashes were coming from the cliff fast as he rolled when he caught the rope and began to haul himself in. Ngiki had to watch the wheel in those waters. But the aim from above was poor. Seemingly the white men had not come up or had gone back. He felt pretty certain that the shots that had come so close were white marksmanship.

Suddenly Fleming saw Ngiki appear above the taffrail, the wheel abandoned, reaching for the line and hauling.

"S'ark, *saka*, s'ark!" he gasped. "Hurry!"

Fleming hoisted himself from the water, thankful for the flat counter that gave him a temporary foothold, as Ngiki leaned far over and caught him in the hollow of one knee. Fleming managed to surmount the rail and the two men went rolling together to the wheel, where Fleming jumped to his feet and controlled the spokes just as a *williwaw* flurried down through the gap in the cone and almost set the sloop aback.

"Look!" said Ngiki.

A BULLET skitted through the mainsail and dug itself into the deck close to Fleming, but he stared where Ngiki pointed while the sloop came up into the wind again. The high dorsal of a shark, trailing bluish-green streamers as it went, passed on its patrol. Fleming shivered a little as he headed out, Ngiki paying out the sheet. To have escaped the rifles on the cliffs only to have dived into the maw of a shark was not a pleasant thing to think of.

But they were not out of it yet. A mile from land Ngiki touched Fleming's elbow and pointed aft. Under the stars stole a shadowy shape that showed two tiny eyes, one green, one crimson. It was Harper's schooner, that could sail three knots where the sloop sailed two, coming up fast. She was plain in the night-glasses, apart from her side-lights, surely lit out of mockery, for there was little need of navigation regulations in these lonely waters of the Koro Sea. With the wind aft, Harper's schooner could make twelve knots easily; Fleming was doing well if he logged eight. The schooner would be alongside in fifteen minutes. Long before that they would commence firing with their rifles and Fleming had nothing aboard of heavier caliber and longer range than his automatic. Ngiki had no weapon save knife or belaying-pin. The odds would be four or five to one.

It was impossible to shake them off. On board the schooner they could see the sloop through their glasses under the tropical starlight far too clearly for Fleming to make any attempt at a split tack. The wind was brisk, inclined to blow hard, and the seas were snappy and crisp with foam. Fleming dragged a balloon jib out of the forepeak and set it, sparring it out to port with a boat-hook. He swayed out the mainboom to starboard and prevented it with a line forward. The *Lelemotu* squatted like a duck and scudded her fastest. Somehow the schooner did not seem to gain as she ought. Fleming fancied she was foul. But the chase couldn't last long. Little by little the red and the green lights sneaked up and spits of fire showed at the schooner's bows where they were wasting lead.

Fleming gave the wheel to Ngiki and lit the cabin lamp, digging among his charts. He found what he wanted and then turned the pages of an astronomical almanac. Coming on deck, he found that the schooner was overhauling them slowly but surely. He had brought up a lantern which he bent on to his flag halyards with marlin and hoisted, running it on the halyards to the starboard spreader and down again as if in defiance. The next time they fired from the schooner Fleming shot off his automatic three times, trusting it might be seen, though it could not be heard up-wind. Ngiki stared at him curiously but said nothing. He had learned long ago not to interfere with his white chief in emergencies. If Falemingi wanted to show exactly where they were, that was his business. Besides, he might be signaling. But he ventured a remark when Fleming came aft, leaving the lantern half-mast high—

"They got one-two reef along that schooner."

The schooner was close enough now for Fleming to see, with the night-glasses that Ngiki's savage eyes did not need, that the gaffs of both fore and main were low. Evidently the natives when they furled had not taken out the reef last used, and

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so far Harper did not bother to shake it. He very well knew the wide expanse that Fleming would have to cross before he made a landfall. With something of the cat-and-mouse attitude he deferred his certain victory and regain of the pearls. As for Ngiki and himself, Fleming never doubted what would be their probable ending if they were overhauled. Killed—at long or short distance—and sunk with the sloop! The five white men on the schooner would have committed a dozen murders apiece for the twenty thousand dollars that was their anticipated share, half of which was now in Fleming's possession.

"If he doesn't shake out those reefs in half an hour," said Fleming more to himself than Ngiki, "we've got him. Sea's rising nicely. I'm going to fix up some dynamite with short throwing fuses, Ngiki. They can't sink us by rifle-fire and if we can keep alive until they board us we'll scratch 'em a bit."

Ngiki nodded. He didn't think much of their chances. He knew nothing of Fleming's mission, only that their pursuers were in deadly earnest. But he puffed away at his pipe complacently, conserving for the final rally.

Twenty minutes went by with waves mounting and the wind beginning to howl through the rigging. The mainboom of the sloop began to skim the crests and Fleming took it up with the topping lift, shifting his peak and throat halyards. A mishap would be fatal. The schooner was less than half a mile away and every now and then a missile would go *whup* through the canvas. Under starlight, in such a sea, at such a distance, close work was not possible. Only a lucky—or unlucky—chance could score a hit. The sound of the shots came down the wind.

Fleming studied his stars as he humored the sloop, head-heavy of canvas, inclined to swerve like a shying horse as she swept down the valley of the seas or struggled up the opposing slopes. Every yard might count, and he got the best out of her.

"They shake out reef," announced Ngiki.

Harper, tired of fooling, had issued the order at last before it was too late to risk it, for all signs and the barometer clearly indicated now that there was going to be a gale. But Fleming only chuckled.

"I think, Ngiki, I'll bet five to one on it, that they're going to be too late. Take the wheel. I'm going for'ard."

Ngiki, uncomprehending, watched him go into the bows with the night-glasses. Imperturbable, the native did not flinch when the bullets began to buzz like bees above his head or land with a *thuck* in the taffrail and the head of the companionway. Once he turned his head as a shout came from the schooner, a taunting order to come into the wind. A sniping bullet hit the bowl of his pipe and tore it from his teeth. Ngiki snarled and rubbed his aching jaw with one hand. Then Fleming came aft again, a grin on his face.

"Five minutes more, Ngiki, and we shall see what we shall see. They're coming up fast, but——"

He staggered back. A bullet had clipped him in the left forearm. He slapped his hand over the wound and the blood came through the sleeve of his coat.

"No bones broken, I fancy," he muttered between set teeth. "Well, it's going to be cheap at that, if——"

The schooner was little more than two hundred yards away and coming on like a cup-winner. Her sails, out wing-and-wing, caught the faint starshine on the rounded curves of the canvas. She seemed to soar as she lifted over the top of a wave, to come seething down its slope in a smother of spray that was thick with phosphorescence. Shot after shot came from her bows. Fleming shook his sound fist at her.

"I'll pack a rifle aboard after this," he said. "Planter or not, I'll take no chances. Wait till you get a little closer. Wait!"

But the automatic was no good for anything over fifty yards. Each wave saw the distance a little diminished. The schooner appeared bent upon running down the sloop, so true did she keep in its course, now actually entering the tail of its wake.

The color of the water alongside changed. It had been deepest blue, almost black, streaked with sea-fire. Now it became suddenly greener and every pint of it was aflame with phosphor. Also there was twice as much foam. The seas were yeasty with it and they seemed to run more tempestuously.

A megaphoned roar came from the schooner.

"Heave to, Fleming, or I'll sink you!"

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Fleming jumped for his own megaphone and yelled back against the wind.

"Come on and try it! Come on!"

The sloop suddenly swung off its course, threatening to jibe as Fleming's warning shout and hasty hand to the spokes showed Ngiki the danger of losing the mast. Ngiki was staring aft.

"Look, *saka,* look. By goddamighty, she go ashore!"

Right in their course the schooner reared as if mounting on a giant sea. But her bowsprit remained pointing skyward; her sails shivered, and then the foremast snapped and the canvas wrinkled and bellied in a confusion of stays and halyards. She tilted slowly to one side and began to slew round with the waves breaking over her.

"She's fairly on," said Fleming. "Harper hasn't charted these seas as I have. She draws sixteen foot to our ten and she's on fair and fast. He'll be there this time tomorrow unless he tries for land in his whale-boats. We'll stick around a bit and see. Better get a watch-tackle on that mainsheet against the time we tack, Ngiki; I've only got one arm."

It was hard work to get in the balloon jib but Ngiki accomplished it and flattened the mainsail. The sloop shot off on a reaching tack and back again, saved by reason of her lesser draught and Fleming's soundings of the island-to-be, whose coral builders were still well below the surface. Fleming had led the schooner deliberately into the trap and stranded her.

As they came close they saw her hard on the reef, the wreck of her foremast dragging overside and pounding at her hull, spume flying over her. And, rowing hard against headseas and headwind on a painful progress, two whale-boats made slow laborious work of it, bearing Harper and his discomfited comrades.

"IT IS a good thing," Fleming said later to Helen Starkey, "that I've made a success of the vanilla proposition. Otherwise, now that these pearls have turned up, they might be saying that I wanted to marry you for your money."

The widow gasped a little.

"You're not very complimentary," she said.

"I never am, somehow, when I mean to be," said Fleming.

"You haven't said you did, you know," she said.

"Did what?"

"Wanted to marry me. Why?"

Fleming turned fiery red and fussed with the bandage of his wounded arm, but he got it out at last.

"Because I love you."

"If you had said that a long time ago," she said, "it would have saved a lot of time and trouble."

"But," she added the next time she spoke, which was after a considerable period during which Fleming silently lamented the luck that had deprived him of the use of one arm at a time when he most needed two, "if you had, I wouldn't have got my pearls."

Fleming had lost the connection and looked at her lovingly but blankly.

"If I had what?" he asked.

"Nothing," she answered smilingly.

"Instead of which," declared Fleming, using his one arm to the best advantage, "I have everything."

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ROCK CREEK JIM RIPPLEMEAD'S BOY

by Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "Godfather to Satan's Kitchen," "The Lavender Letter," etc.

WHEN Grandpap Peacher's favorite daughter Ellen married in defiance of his wish and will he promptly cast her off; she was his favorite daughter because, unlike the rest of his children, she had blue eyes and coppery hair. "Rock Creek Jim" Ripplemead took his new wife to his new cabin on Rock Creek, where a year later a son was born to them. They named that son Thomas Jefferson, afterward calling him affectionately "Bluster" on account of his talking so much. Rock Creek Jim lived an exemplary life for more than a decade, until a certain "Pole" Davids rashly began to tell it around in a very barefaced fashion that he was a falsifier.

They caught little Bluster's strapping father by means of legalized trickery, tried him eventually and eventually hanged him. A year passed; Grandpap Peacher's favorite daughter died from no apparent cause and Bluster, twelve years of age, was gathered up and grudgingly taken to live with his maternal grandparents. Where he went half naked. His lot was worse than that of a stray mongrel. He was a Ripplemead, and the last of the Ripplemeads, and his father had been hanged.

But a turning-point came. One fine June afternoon he made the acquaintance of a party of campers from a distant city and they rather fell in love with him. Before long they presented him with a purse of some ten dollars; he hied himself forthwith to the commissary of a neighboring logging-camp and spent the money for new clothing, striped candy and a single-bladed barlow-knife. His purchases complete, he hastened back to Grandpap Peacher's to show them.

The aged hillman sat in the front doorway of his cabin, a long rifle across his rheumatic knees. His eyes seemed to be on fire, they blazed so, and his lined face was almost as white as his beard. Bluster walked proudly up the rain-washed path and halted squarely before his grandsire. He didn't yet know that one of the Peachers had that day been arrested and taken to a lowland jail, not for having operated a small moonshine still of the "thumper" variety, but for having been caught at it. Somebody, of course, had told for the sake of the reward.

"Looky here, gran'pap!" grinned Bluster, glancing down at his shoddy finery. "I got some candy, too, gran'pap, and I got a knife what's so sharp it'd might' nigh shave a sleepin' mouse 'thout a-wakin' it up. Want some candy, gran'pap?"

Old Peacher fastened his bitter, burning eyes on the lad's face. The lad's face quickly took on a sober, half-defiant aspect.

"What's a-eatin' on ye, gran'pap?" he wanted to know quite seriously.

"Ye Judas!" flared old Peacher. "Ye

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told on Dave—ye told! And the officers has done gone and took him off to jail But I shore never expected anything better o' ye, 'cause yore daddy was hung. And so now ye're a-wearin' purple and fine linen which was bought wi' the money they gi' ye fo' a-tellin'—ye sneakin' little Judas!"

The Ripplemead made no reply to that miserably unjust accusation; perhaps it would have been useless to deny it anyway. He merely stared, slowly narrowing one topaz-brown eye after the other. But his grandfather's words had hurt. "Yore daddy was hung!" He had heard it a thousand times and it was seared in his heart as with a branding-iron. They could never know—oh, never—how it stung him to hear them say that: "Yore daddy was hung!"

The old mountaineer lowered his gaze in spite of himself, parted his mustaches with two fingers and spat contemptuously. The boy spoke, as much to himself as to his grandparent.

"I'm a-goin' off some'eres," he drawled, "where they don't know who I am."

All of which explains how it came about that Bluster Ripplemead appeared at the logging-camp of the Knight-McIvers Lumber Company at sundown of the second day afterward.

THIS camp was on Skeleton Creek. There was a big and rough boarding-house, a commissary in another big and rough building, and a machinery repair shed, all in a clearing of less than an acre. In the near-by laurels stood a tiny house for the explosives which were used in blasting out new logging-railroads.

The crew of stalwart and bronzed, booted and broad-hatted, corduroyed timberjacks had just come in from the woods when Bluster arrived; they were lounging here and there on the boarding-house porch, waiting for the supper gong. One of these rose and confronted the weary boy curiously as he halted before the steps. He was a huge man, a Goliath of a man, with short and curling black beard and keen but small, mean black eyes. This was "Crooked Mark" Britlett, the Skeleton Creek outfit's bully; he hailed from Bluster Ripplemead's own country—the country around Rock Creek.

"Hello, Bluster!" he exclaimed. "What ye a-doin' away over here, forty miles from home and no bell on—hey?"

Without waiting for little Ripplemead to answer he turned to his fellows with the four terrible words—

"His daddy—" with a jerk of his thumb—"stretched hemp."

Had Bluster been of ordinary stuff he would have wilted like a weed before a scythe, for the disappointment was most trying. They knew, even here. As it was, he stood stock still and stared at Crooked Mark Britlett until the bully looked uneasily in another direction. Then there came to pass that which both amazed and delighted little Ripplemead.

A tall and slender young logger with brown hair and brown eyes seemed to come from nowhere; he walked straight to Crooked Mark and deliberately, without a word, gave him a smashing, crashing punch in the face.

"Hooray!" yelled Bluster. "Hooray!"

Britlett let out a howl that was all oath, recovered himself and struck two pile-driver blows that sent his assailant reeling backward off the porch to lay where he had fallen.

"Ye yaller polecat!" cried Bluster. "Mark Britlett, ye yaller polecat!"

For he thought that the tall and slender young man had been taking his, Bluster Ripplemead's, part. In point of fact, however, such was far from being the case.

What the Bully might have said was cut short by the camp cook's banging on the railroad-iron, triangular gong on the back porch. Except for the logger who lay beside the steps, the crew rushed wildly for the dining-room and supper. The boy knelt before his fallen champion and touched him lightly on the shoulder.

"Mister!" he said. "Mister!"

The logger sat up and rubbed his chin, which was swollen; he gingerly touched his brow, which was bruised and purple. He remembered, and a smile of triumph spread over his strong, sunburned countenance.

"I got blood that time," he jubilated. "Did ye notice it, son?"

Young Ripplemead smiled too.

"From Crookud Mark Britlett? Shore, ye got blood. Ye busted him in the nose. I seed it. It sounded like this—*snick!* Might I ax what is yore name, mister?"

"George Home. Some day I'll fix his clock—Crookud's clock. I don't mean I'll kill him, o' course, fo' because I ain't

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no killer. I mean I'll thrash him up and down and sideways and all over. I shore got the red this time, didn't I? If Peggy——"

He broke off abruptly. Bluster's eyes questioned. Who was Peggy? Then his thoughts centered upon himself.

"I cain't he'p it about my daddy a-bein' hung, can I?" said he, plaintively. "Pole Davids said he was a liar, and no gen'ulman would take that, George Home."

"Right," agreed Home most heartily. He looked oddly at the lad. "Shore, ye cain't he'p it about yore daddy a-bein' hung, but folks don't never want to fo'git things like that, which is a lowdown shame, and sometimes I wonder what God thinks about 'em. Crookud Britlett——"

HOME broke off abruptly again. His eyes were now riveted on the slim but rounded and pretty figure of a barefooted young woman in calico who was walking with a striking air of high-headed independence along the path that led across the clearing and to the commissary's front door. Bluster Ripplemead looked and he, too, saw her. All the world turned queer to him then, for she was a great deal like old Grandpap Peacher's favorite daughter Ellen, his mother. She had the same blue eyes, the same coppery hair, the same figure—almost the same face.

The boy rose and went involuntarily toward her. Their eyes met; his in pleading, hers in wonderment. Suddenly little Ripplemead stopped, turned and walked back to George Home, who had got to his feet. Home was looking toward the girl with a peculiar something in his gaze. She gave him a glance that was meant for one of unutterable contempt, held her coppery head even higher, and walked on.

When she had disappeared inside the commissary Bluster caught the logger's hand.

"Who was that, George Home?" he half whispered, his voice shaking.

No answer. Bluster jerked the logger's hand impatiently and repeated—

"Who was that, George Home?"

The man turned his face toward the boy—a face wearing a barely noticeable pallor.

"That's Peggy," he answered. "Peggy McEllister. Crookud Mark Britlett, he's a-goin' to marry her, they say."

"'Cause fo' why?"

"S'arch me! The Lord knows; I'm shore I don't. He—but I won't talk about nobody to his back, son, and that's all the' is to it, not even Crookud Mark. She's purty, all right, hain't she, son?"

"Purtier'n a speckled pup with a ribbon round its neck," Bluster declared very soberly. "George Home, when I fust seed her I thought—I thought she—I thought——"

Ripplemead though he was, he rather went to pieces then. Home sat down on the steps and took the lad on his knee and in the circle of his arm.

"Pore little feller," he commiserated, feeling strangely drawn to the boy. "Son, buck up like a big man wi' boots on and tell me all about what's a-botherin' ye so. Ye can shore count on me, son. I'll be yore pal through thick and thin, damnation, destruction and high water. Let her come, little 'un; rickollect I'm yore pal from now ontel the stars falls into Skeleton Creek."

While the other loggers laughed, poked rough-fun and ate ravenously in the rough dining-room, there was an exchange of confidences on the steps that led to the porch. Bluster came right out with everything and his story so moved the man that he slipped off nearly all of his usual reticence. Home told Bluster everything, too—almost. Home's story was a short one. Britlett had hated him on sight and persecuted him relentlessly for a long time, and Peggy, Peggy McEllister, was doubtless the innocent cause of that. He believed that Britlett was somehow responsible for some trouble he had been having with the McEllister girl, who had once agreed to marry him. Therefore he fought Britlett at every half-way decent opportunity though he always got whipped. It was a matter of principle. But the last time that he had tackled Crooked Mark he had drawn the red and he was infinitely pleased. Some day he would whip Britlett.

As for his job, he was the dynamite man. That is, he handled the explosives that were used in blasting out new logging-road branches. Did Bluster see that little house over there in the laurels, beyond the commissary? Bluster saw. Well, that was the dynamite house, and he, George Home, was the only person allowed anywhere near it.

"Why don't ye shoot Crookud Mark?" the Ripplemead demanded seriously.

George Home narrowed his eyes. He re-

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membered the lad's story and he hardly knew what to say. As he himself had declared, Home was no killer. Shooting people up should be discredited, but not in a manner, certainly, that would add disgrace to the memory of poor Rock Creek Jim. He half turned his head and saw Nathan Birdman, the logging outfit's burly superintendent, standing in the main doorway of the boarding-house. Birdman was picking his teeth with a home-made goose-quill toothpick.

"Ye need a kitchen boy, Bird," drawled Home, "and this here boy wants the job. The' won't be no trouble about his pay."

"All right," said Bird, nodding, still working energetically on his big white teeth. "All right. Go to the dinin-'room, son, and light into the supper. Hustle up—git a move on—jump lively!"

The last came sharply, too sharply. Little Ripplemead sprang, bristling, from George Home's knee.

"I don't 'low nobody," he said hotly, "to tell me to hustle up, and git a move on, and jump lively. Any more o' that and I'm liable to bust that forrard o' yores with a rock."

Superintendent Birdman laughed. He laughed so loudly and so boisterously that the surrounding mountainsides themselves laughed in echoes. And yet it all came good-humoredly.

"That's the sperit, son," said he. "I'll gi' ye fifty cents more on the week jest fo' that. But ef ye don't hustle, son, ye won't find no supper left; that's what I meant. Them fellers in there eats like razorback hawgs."

Bluster went along with George Home into the dining-room. They sat down beside each other on a bench, and a near-by timberjack observed foolishly, with a semi-worshipful glance toward Crooked Mark—

"So this here boy's daddy was hung?"

At that the two new pals went to work as with one mind. Bluster caught up a soft but Herculean butter and dashed it into the unwise logger's face, while George Home clapped a big bowl of soupy beans down on the unwise logger's head.

It was the last that the last Ripplemead ever heard of his father's having stretched hemp—except from Mark Britlett.

The youthful newcomer was so tired that he fell asleep almost as soon as his slender body had straightened itself out on the narrow bed that had been allotted to him in the big up-stairs sleeping-quarters of the loggers; his bed was close beside that of George Home. He awoke before any of the others had begun to wake, the following morning, and he lay there and thought of that which had taken place since his arrival at the Skeleton Creek Camp. By dawn he had guessed a thing that his new pal had not told him outright which was this: Home was so fond of Peggy McEllister that their misunderstanding, or whatever it was, was literally playing havoc with him. Mountaineers, when they love, love quickly and forever.

What would a fellow be worth, Bluster asked himself, if he didn't help a pal in such dire need? This love business was sickening, but all the same George Home had it. Bluster decided that he would help George Home, and he further decided that he would begin with Peggy.

When the first third of his work in the kitchen was over on the next day, which was Sunday, the boy set out to find Peggy McEllister. He hadn't named his intentions to his pal, because his pal would possibly object; besides, Bluster Ripplemead was of a breed that had generally relied solely upon its own counsel.

A man whom he met in the woods told him how he could find old Thaddeus McEllister's cabin. It was low and rambling and it had been built of hewn logs; honeysuckles grew over the porch and the windows and there were apple-trees, marigolds, zinnias, and bachelor's-buttons in the yard. Bluster halted at the split-paling gate as a somber-eyed and suspicious hound came nosing down the guttered path. The lad hallooed.

THADDEUS McELLISTER came to the door. He walked with a dogwood cane, carried a reed-temmed clay pipe in his mouth and wore brass-rimmed spectacles on his brow; his hair and beard were white. When he saw the boy he frowned; he knew that it was the son of Rock Creek Jim Ripplemead, who had been hung. News always travels rapidly in Tennessee's back o' beyond or it doesn't travel at all. News of Bluster's coming had spread out from the camp as if from some central wireless station.

"Well, out with it!" McEllister grunted in a sort of disinterested fashion.

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"I want to see Peggy," announced Bluster.

Thaddeus McEllister straightened. He seemed suddenly angry.

"Did that low-down dawg of a Crookud Mark Britlett send ye to Peggy?" he demanded.

"Yeuh—" and Bluster sneered one jewel of a sneer—"like —— he did. I'd ha' come o' him not to save his life. 'Low-down dawg' is shore right, mister. Can I see Peggy now or'll I haf to wait ontel I find he chanst to sneak around like a blame' weasel and see her? 'Cause I'm shorely o the Lord a-goin' to see her. Yeuh, I am."

Peggy's father looked hard at the boy for a long minute and he was the first of the two to let down his gaze; few had ever been able to stare Bluster out of countenance. McEllister turned slowly toward the interior of his log house—

"Peg," he called, "come here! Somebody wants to see ye!"

He disappeared, and a moment later his daughter, barefooted, her hair hanging down her back in a single thick, coppery plait, took his place in the doorway. For a breath or two she stood eying the lad narrowly. Then she spoke—

"Come in, ef ye ain't afeard o' the dawg."

"Afeard o' the dawg!" echoed Bluster Ripplemead, tilting his freckled nose in spirited disdain. "Peggy, I want to tell ye right here and now 'at I ain't afeard o' the devil. I got some talk fo' ye, Peggy, and I don't want nobody else but you to hear it. Would you mind a-walkin' down here to the gate?"

The girl considered the matter and finally went down to the gate. There the pair of them stood in silent appraisal of each other; the one fumbling absently with the end of her rope of coppery hair, the other idly digging a tiny hole in the mountain's black breast with his right big toe. Bluster was the first to speak, and he went at it in his own particular way.

"Peggy McEllister," said he, "ye're a —— fool."

Peggy McEllister jerked herself upward as if from an electric shock. Her blue eyes flew wide; she blushed and went pale by turns, tried to think of some fitting, withering thing to say and failed utterly.

"Who teached you to cuss thataway, boy?" she finally asked.

"I teached myself, by jingoes. Do ye want to know how come it that ye're that kind of a fool?"

She didn't answer. He went on:

" 'Cause ye throwed George Home down fo' that yaller polecat of a Crookud Mark Britlett—that's why. I'm George Home's pal, Peggy, and I got a right to know what made ye throw him down. Will ye tell me?"

"Ax George!" Peggy snapped angrily, and her eyes were hard.

"But I—I 'spect he wouldn't want to talk about it," muttered Bluster. "Shore enough now, what was the trouble atwixt ye?"

Peggy McEllister's eyes went a little harder.

"Ax George!" she repeated. "He done it his own self. It wasn't none o' my fault. Now, boy, I'm done wi' talkin' about George Home. Ef ye ain't got nothin' else to talk about I reckon I'll go in the house."

He knew she meant it. It was in her voice that she meant it. Bluster wanted time in which to think of some method of drawing her out, of getting to the bottom of the difficulty. His head dropped. Peggy began to shift impatiently from one bare foot to the other; she'd be leaving him shortly, he knew. Then his sober gaze fell upon a rent in one of the knees of his new trousers and he bent over and thrust a forefinger into it.

"These here is my new britches, Peggy," said he. "Would ye mind a-sewin' this hole up fo' me? Ef ye will, I'll tell ye somethin' about these here new britches."

Peggy's countenance softened. She smiled at him and said sweetly—

"Come up on the po'ch, boy. I'd do that much fo' ye, shorely."

She did it with a practised hand. Before the task was finished she knew all he was able to tell her of himself, and she knew that she looked a great deal like old Grandpap Peacher's daughter Ellen; it caused her manner toward the Ripplemead to become decidedly more considerate, too. Bluster, however, failed signally in his mission. She simply would not tell him what it was that had come between her and George Home, and, seeing that she simply wouldn't, he apologized awkwardly for having said that she was that kind of a fool and hastened to the camp to help the cook with the Sunday dinner.

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A WEEK passed. Bluster Ripplemead had finished falling in love with Peggy McEllister, and she with him. He thought of George Home, his pal, in an idolatrous light, and Home liked him just as much but in a somewhat different way. He had worked himself into old Thaddeus McEllister's high regard, in that week, and he had grown to hate Crooked Mark Britlett more than ever—for one reason. Britlett had widened the scope of his powers of persecution and taken in the boy as well as George Home.

After Bluster's kitchen work in connection with the next Sunday's noonday meal was over Superintendent Birdman offered him an extra ten cents if he would sweep out his office. The latter-named was a sort of cubby-hole in a down-stairs corner of the boarding-house, and the loggers were wont to speak of it as "The Bird's-Nest." Bluster jumped at the chance, found a broom and went to the task gleefully; with that extra dime he would buy a bag of candy for Peggy.

Boylike, he swept everything under the scarred desk; then he went down on his hands and knees and peered under it. His eyes widened interestedly at that which he saw. A few more seconds and he had dragged out a Winchester rifle; he straightened with it, handling it with a certain tenderness, a certain awe and boundless admiration.

"It's Bird's and it's jest like pap's," he said aloud. "It's Bird's and it's jest like pap's."

He worked the lever—any mountaineer boy of twelve knows how—and one cartridge clattered to the floor while another slipped from magazine to chamber.

"It's jest like pap's," he said yet again.

There came an unpleasant, burring chuckle from the doorway. Bluster looked upward and saw the leering countenance of Mark Britlett.

"Was you," frowned Bluster, "a-laughin' at me?"

Britlett ignored the question.

"On yore way, ain't ye?" he sneered.

"On my way where?" clipped Bluster.

"On yore way to be hung," said Britlett.

The Ripplemead's topaz-brown eyes became a pair of slits. He turned the barrel of the Winchester until it bore full upon the chest of the Goliath and drew the hammer back.

"Call me what Pole Davids called my daddy," he said icily, "and see."

Britlett's coarse, dark face went a trifle ashen. Not that he was afraid, however. No such bully is ever afraid until after he's been beaten once; then, naturally, he reverts to the tallow from whence he came. It was anger rather than fear that sent his face a trifle ashen.

But he didn't call Bluster what Napoleon Davids had called Bluster's father.

Britlett turned and walked off. Bluster thrust the repeater under the desk, found Birdman and received his pay and then went toward the commissary.

A man stood in the commissary door, blocking the way for the boy. Bluster halted on the step and turned his freckled face smilingly upward in protest. But when he saw who it was that stood there his smile faded, his eyes flashed. It was Britlett.

"Le' me through, Crookud!" snapped the lad.

Britlett sneered and seemed to be trying to widen himself. Bluster Ripplemead snatched his barlow-knife from one of his trousers pockets and opened it.

"Le' me through, Crookud," he said, "or I'll cut through. Git me?"

At sight of the barlow Britlett clicked his teeth together. With the flat of his hand the brute struck the boy down.

Now George Home had been about to enter the little explosives house in the near-by laurels at that moment and he had seen, out of the tail of his eye, the bully's unspeakable deed. He left the door unlocked and rushed for Britlett. Crooked Mark saw him coming and stepped to the ground to meet him, but it was a new George Home that Mark Britlett met on this fine Sunday afternoon. Home had fought only for himself before; now he was fighting for his friend, his pal, the boy he loved, and it made a difference. Britlett put up his guards with a wicked and altogether confident smirk and Home dove through them like a panther.

Somebody yelled "Fight!" The rest of the Skeleton Creek crew poured itself into a ring about the belligerents, who were now locked in each other's arms and striving desperately to throw each other to the ground. The circle of onlookers was no more than complete when George Home, fairly electrified by the new spirit of

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courage that filled him, turned like a greased spindle in Britlett's arms. He flung an elbow over Britlett's great neck, doubled like a jack-knife and sent the huge body of his antagonist crashing to the ground.

A chorus of shouts went up, telling George Home that the sympathies of many men were with him. Bluster Ripplemead yelled:

"Ye got him! Ye got him, George Home, old pal! Watch out!"

Crooked Mark had already found his feet and he was now purple with a rage that was primitive and terrible; nobody had ever thrown him like that before. He gritted a wild oath and made for Home. The latter side-stepped with almost the quickness of lightning and sent a left hook horizontally to the bottom of Britlett's breast-bone as he passed. Britlett halted and wheeled. He was insane with anger now; all the fighting tactics and generalship he knew were suddenly forgotten. He led out with tremendous blows—blows that might have killed Home had they landed in full weight; and every time he left the bottom of his breast-bone uncovered for even a second Home punished him there with a fist that came like a thunderbolt.

Five minutes—long minutes in a ruleless and gloveless battle such as this—went by. Bluster Ripplemead was yelling like a drunken Cherokee Indian. The Goliath was beginning to show the effects of those everlasting drives at the bottom of his breast-bone; he was becoming groggy. Home, too, was weakening, but not so rapidly as Britlett, though he spat blood, saw through a bloody haze, even seemed to be breathing blood. Then Britlett began to cover only the point that Home had been striving for so hard. That was the beginning of the end.

The end came with a pile-driver punch delivered at the base of the jaw. It broke a bone in George Home's hand, but that didn't matter, for it also sent Crooked Mark Britlett to a heavy fall on his back—beaten, unable to rise, a bully no more.

There was some cheering. All the other timberjacks looked in admiration toward the new champion of the Skeleton Creek outfit. Super Birdman patted him on the back with a brotherly hand. Then Bluster, fairly weeping in his happiness, led his idol to the creek, where the idol knelt and washed his face and hands and neck of their stains and grime.

AN HOUR later and Bluster was hallooing at the gate of the McEllisters. He was going to tell Peggy of the great victory that George Home had won. She had already heard of it, doubtless, but that made little difference to the boy.

Peggy came out smiling. She wore a new blue calico dress, and there was a bow of new blue ribbon on the tip of her rope of coppery hair, and she had on shoes and stockings because it was Sunday. They sat down together under an apple-tree in the yard. Then Bluster told her all about it, even to the smallest detail, and she didn't appear to be grieving over Britlett's defeat.

"You shore wouldn't marry Crookud Mark now, Peggy, would ye?" he said at the end of it.

"I never had no notion o' marryin' Mark Britlett and I never promised I would," flared Peggy before she thought—maybe—for she had been allowing the tale to run in the name of spite.

"But he's been a-tellin' it."

"He—he has?"

"Yeuh; he—he has. Say, Peggy; listen here, honey! Ye know I love ye to death and ye know edzactly why. It's 'cause ye're so much like her. And I love George Home, too. He's the finest feller in the world. Why cain't I have ye both, Peggy, at the same time? Please tell me what it was 'at come atwixt George Home and you—please!"

Peggy put her arms around him and hugged him. Love begets love. She loved him too.

"Bluster," she finally said to him, "I don't like to talk about it. I shore don't. Me and George had a—a quarrel. We was a-settin' right here under this very apple tree, and I don't rickollect what it was about. I sent him off; I was so ongodly mad at him. He met Mark Britlett a little ways down the path and Mark axed him what was the matter. And then George—George he said somethin' about me—somethin' that no woman on earth, good or bad, could ever fo'give."

Something that no woman on earth, good or bad, could ever forgive. "What," asked Bluster, "was it he said?"

Peggy, pale, distraught, swallowed and swallowed, and stared absently at a bee that hovered over a near-by clover blossom.

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"It don't matter," she murmured, so low that the lad beside her barely heard it. "It don't matter what it was he said."

And he could get no more out of her.

THE Summer sun was hidden behind the pine-fringed crest of the dim-blue western mountain when Bluster Ripplemead arrived at the camp. Bluster looked over the timberjacks who frolicked in wrestling matches and boxing bouts in the clearing but failed to see his pal anywhere. He did see Crooked Mark Britlett, defeated and depedestaled and disgraced though he well knew he was, hadn't left the outfit, which usually happens in cases such as this. The reason was vengeance and Peggy McEllister. The erstwhile bully had just finished a bit of more than dastardly work in the near-by woods when the boy found him.

The erstwhile bully sat on a log, his curly-bearded face hard and bitter, and watched the rollicking loggers with eyes that saw them not. Bluster walked straight up to him. Bluster had been doing some rather intelligent thinking and he believed that he had come to the core of the difficulty that lay between Peggy McEllister and George Home. Britlett had lied. Peggy herself, of course, should have thought of that possibility. But Peggy was ultra-feminine, and she was mad, mad, mad! Had it not been for their actual quarrel just before Britlett brought the lie to her. . . .

"Crookud," Bluster Ripplemead said measuredly, "what was it you tole Peggy about George Home?"

No answer.

"Crookud," Bluster pursued, "what was it you tole Peggy?"

Britlett only stared. His small, mean, keen eyes were like oily black beads.

"What was it you tole Peggy?" the Ripplemead demanded again.

Britlett seemed to be thinking of something else.

Bluster wheeled and made for The Birdnest and came back two short minutes later with Superintendent Birdman's Winchester in his hands. He drew the hammer back to a full. He held the rifle over his hip with the breech behind him and the barrel trained squarely upon the Goliath.

"What was it you tole Peggy about George Home?" he repeated, his voice bleak, white and steady.

Britlett half turned his great shaggy head. He stared at the hole in the rifle's muzzle, then at the boy's threatening countenance. The timberjacks in the clearing ceased their horseplay; half a dozen of them started toward the lad to disarm him. Bluster saw the half dozen, leaped to a near-by wall of laurels and placed his back against it.

"Mind yore own business!" he shrilled. "Keep back! My daddy was hung, dang yore souls!"

The loggers stopped, afraid of Birdman's rifle. The lad turned again to his arch-enemy.

"One more time. What was it you tole Peggy, Crookud?"

"Tole Peggy!" It came like an echo. "I never tole Peggy nothin'."

"Ye did! Ye did! Ye busted her and George Home all up!"

Britlett rose. The man was beside himself, partly because of the dastardly bit of work he had done in the woods shortly before. It was his past that moved him, no doubt, his fearless and bullying past, when he had spoke of the word that had cost Pole Davids his life.

"Ye're a liar!"

Rock Creek Jim Ripplemead's boy fairly jumped. A tremor ran through every fiber and muscle of his slim young body. His freckles stood out plainly against the deathly pallor of his face and his topaz-brown eyes became points of fire. Visions of wriggling ropes with nooses at their ends danced before him. If he shot Crooked Mark Britlett they would hang him as they had hanged his daddy. And yet——

And yet he jerked Superintendent Birdman's rifle up and fired.

Britlett seemed amazed for a fleeting second or two; then he crumpled like a wet rag.

WHEN Bluster turned from the fallen giant he confronted the loggers who had been playing in the clearing and George Home—George Home, his pal. Home took the Winchester gently out of his hands.

"Oh, son!" he said broken-heartedly. "Oh, son!"

Just that, and nothing more.

The lad looked at him reprovingly.

"I'm Rock Creek Jim Ripplemead's boy," he said stoutly.

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Birdman made his appearance then. After sending a logging-locomotive sputtering toward the lowland for a doctor he knelt beside Britlett, turned him face upward and with a blue bandanna sopped up the scarlet trickle that came from a hole in the upper part of his chest. Crooked Mark opened his eyes.

"The kid got me, Bird," he mumbled.

"Yeuh, I'd say!" Birdman nodded. "Pick him up, boys, and carry him to the po'ch. I don't know nothin' else to do fo' him."

They carried him to the boarding-house porch, put him on a blanket and stood around him silently. The news spread with uncanny speed and mountainfolk began to gather—among them being old Thaddeus McEllister and his coppery-haired, blue-eyed daughter. Britlett watched these two as they came up; then he looked toward George Home and finally toward the boy.

"Peggy," said he, his voice queer in the soft mountain twilight, "I—I lied to ye. George didn't say that. Look out fo' the dynamite house, Bird. The door—string—battery——"

Britlett had fainted.

Superintendent Birdman, amid an awesome stillness, placed Crooked Mark's ragged speech together and worked out an answer—the correct answer. Not being willing to take a chance, he tied one end of a small cable to the door of the little explosives house in the laurels, stood fifty yards off and pulled. The tiny building went up with a terrific roar. Britlett had meant to kill George Home and make it appear to be an accident. Bluster Ripplemead had saved his big pal's life.

Darkness fell. When the lowland doctor arrived at the camp on Skeleton Creek he put Britlett to bed in the up-stairs sleeping-quarters of the crew and made extensive examinations.

Twenty minutes later Superintendent Birdman approached a group of four who sat on a log at the edge of the little clearing. These were the two McEllisters, George Home and the Ripplemead. Birdman put a hand down on the lad's shoulder.

"I'm pow'ful glad to tell ye that Crookud ain't a-goin' to die," he said quite happily. "We've all agreed—Crookud hisself started it—that nothin' sh'll ever be said to the law about it."

Birdman walked off, and Thaddeus McEllister rose and went with him. George Home gathered the boy tenderly into the circle of his left arm, and the Ripplemead choked back half a sob.

"He needs us, Peggy," soberly stated George Home. "You and me! And you and me needs each other. And we need him."

She put her hand over his. It was assent, reverence, blessing and a plea for forgiveness—all. None of the three spoke for five minutes. Then Home broke the silence with this—

"What was it, Peggy, that Crooked said that I said about ye?"

"He said," stammered Peggy McEllister, "he said—said that you said—said that my f-f-feet was t-t-too big fo' anything."

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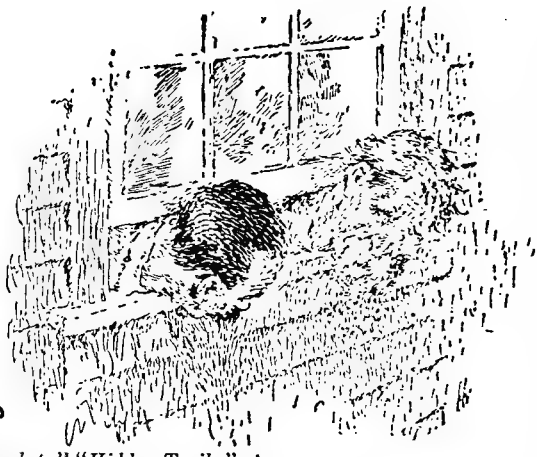
LYNCH LAWYERS

A FIVE-PART STORY

~ PART IV ~

by

William Patterson White



Author of "High Pockets," "Hidden Trails," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

WITH a clatter of hurrying hoofs the posse rode out of town. With it rode Red Kane.

That fifty thousand in gold had been stolen from the express office at Farewell did not worry Red a great deal—ten thousand had been for Bill Lanpher, boss of the SS, and Red's outfit did not love the SS—but Red's little black horse had gone with the money. Red wanted that horse.

Five miles out of Farewell the posse came upon the express box and safe, both open and empty, and two teams of stolen mules. Red and his brother Tom rode on.

"What are you doin'?" A dark-eyed girl looked out of the deserted K C ranch-house at Sweetwater Mountain.

Red Kane told her.

"I see. You thought maybe my father or I had your horse. People think nesters will do 'most anything. Yes, they do. We came by the SS, and the manager was pretty disagreeable. What's his name? Lanpher? Well, you two go back to Lanpher and tell him Dot Lorimer said next time to come himself. Slide, the two of you!"

She trained a Winchester on Red's stomach. Not until he and Tom had gone swiftly away from there did Red remember he was using a borrowed saddle marked with the SS brand. Then, to Tom's amaze, he grinned.

"Some girl!" he said. "Some girl!"

Riding out of town next day, Red and Kansas Casey, deputy sheriff, came upon a man pinned under a fallen cottonwood.

"I live at the old K C ranch," he whispered. "My name is Lorimer."

At the K C ranch, Dot Lorimer bandaged her father's bruised side. Then she turned to Red Kane, and her black eyes narrowed.

"You're awfully persistent about coming out here," she said. "What are your intentions?"

"I'm gonna marry you!"

Came a clatter of hoofs. Sixteen dusty men rode up to the ranch-house. Red noted four with distaste—Durkin, Lenn, Dill, Cox.

"We want this here Lorimer feller," said Carlson, the leader. "The stage was held up, and we think this gent knows something about it. And about the express robbery, too."

"Well," said Kansas Casey, "I guess we'll have to search the house."

Into the house they went. *Bang!* Out they came. Cox nursed a punctured hand. Lorimer's injury hadn't affected his trigger finger.

"We didn't find nothin'," said Durkin, "but I'll bet he held up that stage, just the same."

Bang again. In Durkin's hair appeared a neat crease. Dot Lorimer held a smoking gun.

"Anybody else think my father is a road-agent?" she asked pleasantly.

No one did. The lynching party went away.

Back in Farewell, old Mr. Saltoun, Red's boss, leaned against the jamb of the express office and felt something pricking his shoulder. It was a broken knife blade. Red Kane found the knife. It bore the initials B. L.

What was Lorimer's first name?

And Bill Lanpher, come to howl about his ten thousand, went away with two quart bottles and the conviction that the nesters at the K C ranch had his gold.

•

RED KANE saw him disappearing along the southern trail and longed to follow, but Kansas Casey restrained him.

At the bar of the Starlight Saloon Red and his brother Tom met Carlson of the lynching party. Involuntarily Red shifted his hand toward his hip.

"No hard feelin's," said Carlson, "but look out for Lenn and Dill."

At the dance-hall Red found both—Dill too drunk to fight, but Lenn in a nasty mood. No guns were used, and after the fight was over Red made only one complaint:

"Y' oughta make yore chairs heavier. If the one I used had five more pounds heft, I'd 'a' knocked him silly first crack."

Next morning, after making sure Lenn had left town, Red did an unusual thing, he shaved. At the Nester's ranch-house he found Lorimer alone, mumbling feverishly on his bed:

"I got that money, and it's mine! I'd 'a' killed him, by ——, if I'd had to, but I didn't—I didn't!"

From the window Red saw a troop of horsemen topping a hill a few miles away. There was only

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e thing to do. He gagged Lorimer, for he was rieking in his delirium, words that would mean ath if the approaching troop should hear him.

"Yuh li'l' fool!" whispered Red fiercely as he ind himself gazing down the barrel of a Winester and then into Dot Lorimer's flashing eyes. She kicked and clawed as he took the gun away t, finally, he forced her to listen and, before the rsemen arrived, had almost made her believe in n.

Standing in the doorway, Red watched Lanpher d his punchers gallop up. Each drop of rye in o quart bottles had strengthened Lanpher's urage and his conviction that Lorimer was the ief.

"I'm gonna go in that house, an' you nor no other an is gonna stop me."

Red disagreed and, as a result, it was nineteen ys before he realized that his body had received ur chunks of lead. But Lanpher, too, was layed) and also three of his punchers.

Tom Dowling of the 88 outfit had stood by Red, id that had saved Red's life. Dot Lorimer had ırsed him.

Red's brother Tom heard about the fight and arted out with blood in his eye. A few days ter there was a wounded man at 88 to represent ch one of the holes in Red's body. Though Red's ss, Saltoun, fired Red as soon as he heard the ws, it was too late to stop the feud raging between ar S and 88.

Two things were worrying Red. One was Tom owling, for Red felt he had a rival; the other was mysterious stranger seen before the fight at Farell, and again at Lorimer's.

WILL you marry me?" asked Red one afternoon during his recovery.

Dot's evasive answer left some hope in Red's art.

"The stage's been held up again south o' Injun idge an' they robbed the gov'nor o' the Territory."

Jake Rule and Kansas Casey, his deputy, broke i their visit to Red hastily, but Bill Derr, a riminal-expert in that part of the country, reained to talk with Red.

"You dropped yore knife, misses."

Dot Lorimer took the knife and examined it.

"That's funny; it has dad's initials."

Red Kane hastily jammed his hands in his ockets and found a hole. It was the knife he ad found engraved B. L. He had also found a oin with the same initials. That had gone through ıe hole, too, for now Lorimer was examining both uriously.

"Now ain't that amazin'—my initials an' everyning."

"I lost them," said Red.

Derr walked over to examine them and asked—

"Wher didja get John Hudson's knife?"

"John Hudson's!" exclaimed Red. "Then how loes the B. L. fit in?"

"Brand," explained Derr. "B. L. was his iron. But where did you find 'em?"

"That's all right, Bill, if there's any reward comin' I'm gonna get it alone."

Red found Lorimer's eyes searching his keenly.

"Didja know that was my initials, Red?"

Red looked innocently at him:

"How could I? Yore daughter always called nuh 'pa'!"

'WHAT'S the idea of driftin' in so soft and quiet?" asked Red, as Kansas Casey slid around the corner of the corral.

Red, fully recovered, had been talking with Dot Lorimer beside the spring. Mr. Lorimer was away cutting wood. Kansas Casey was not alone. Jake Rule and Shorty Rumbold with three strangers were searching the house.

In vain Kansas tried to get Red to give up the knife and coin engraved with the initials B. L. He and his party also tried to get information from Dot as to her father's whereabouts. The strange sheriff was insistent and Red was compelled to flatten the man's nose to teach him manners. Red's gun was taken away for safety and with it the knife and coin.

In the house Dot Lorimer made coffee for the visitors; also, to Red's surprize, she named the three strangers and gave some choice bits from their history. Tom Lumley, the Sheriff of Rock County, had been mysteriously connected with murders and robberies, and his two deputies, Billy Bruff and Dunc Rouse, had equally bad reputations, the former being a deserter from the cavalry. Still, they had a warrant for her father's arrest.

"She's signalin'!"

Billy Bruff rushed in with the startling news. None but Red had seen Dot Lorimer put green wood and sod on the fire.

Both Sheriffs with their deputies set out immediately, leaving Red and his brother Tom, who had driven up in the meantime, alone with the girl. She decided that it would be best then and there to tell her story.

In the first place her name was Lenton, not Lorimer. She and her father had owned the Empire mine near Flipup, Rock County, Colorado. Uncle Dick, her father's brother, a worthless drunkard, had been a partner and had urged Lenton to sell out to Lumley, Bruff, Rouse and another—Usher. This was done for sixty thousand dollars in gold.

That night there was a fight over the division of the money; Uncle Dick, drunk as usual, demanded two-thirds. The two brothers finally came to blows, and Dick, badly beaten, at last listened to reason. That night Ben Lenton and his daughter left Flipup with their half of the sixty thousand.

The following day they learned that Dick had been shot and killed, that his share of the money was gone, and that Lenton himself had been accused. Realizing what little chance he stood in that county, with Lumley and his gang in power, Lenton had wandered around for some time till now he had reached Farewell.

It was then and there that Red Kane and his brother determined to find the guilty man whoever and wherever he might be.

That evening the sheriffs returned and with them brought Lenton. His horse had given out, making escape impossible. Dot fainted, but Red came to her aid in more ways than one. He finally proved to Jake Rule that the Colorado sheriff, Lumley, did not have the proper extradition papers, so it was decided that Lenton should be left in the Farewell jail till Rule had been to see the governor about the affair. Lumley and his two friends, looking at Red and Tom, decided to guard the jail personally.

That night Red and Tom set off with "Telescope" Laguerre, the half-breed. They knew that

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Jake Rule could not get back to Farewell the following day, so they decided that the next night they would try the strength of the jail.

At the appointed hour, Tom and Red, while waiting for Telescope north of Indian Ridge, saw four horsemen ride by—one of them was Hollister the mysterious stranger

Finally Laguerre appeared. Red looked eastward "The moon won't rise for three hours," he said "Now for the jail!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CALABOOSE

THEY mounted and fetched a wide semicircle about Farewell. Approaching the town from the west, they proceeded with great caution to the rear of Tom Kane's corral. Here they dismounted, and Tom Kane brought Jack Owens' saddle from the house and cinched it on his toughest animal, a wise strawberry-roan with a hammer head.

"I hope Bill Lainey won't come pilin' over for a last look before turnin' in," whispered Tom, tucking in the loose end of the cinch-strap.

"It'd be just like him," returned Red. "You'd oughta got Mike Flynn to look after yore hosses. He's busy in the evenin'."

Some one turned the corner of Tom Kane's house and came toward the corral. The footsteps were shufflingly heavy. The man's breathing was as heavy as his walk. They heard him say aloud in wheezing tones:

"I know I closed the gate. I know I did."

Even if the darkness had not hidden them they were behind the high stockade of the corral. Red, nearest to the partly closed gate, tiptoed toward it. He made no attempt to lift the lever hanging by its foot-long wire. Instead, he crouched beside the gate and waited, one doubled fist resting knuckles down upon the ground.

"I hate to do it," he thought. "I shore do, but——"

The man stopped at the gate and, standing a little sidewise, put his hand upon the top cross-bar. Red Kane straightened his long body with a jerk and drove a hard fist accurately home beneath the man's left ear. The man dropped like a mauled steer and lay spread-eagled, his face to the sky and his feet in a cluster of bitterweed.

"Bill Lainey, shore," whispered Red in answer to his brother's low-voiced question. "He'll be out for ten minutes. We gotta gag him. This stick'll do. Naw, not yore handkerchief, Tom. They could trace that. Take his. Ease him over so's we can get his suspenders off. They'll do to tie his feet with. Lordy, ain't he a fat lummox! Huh? Hafta rip his sleeves out Shore, tear 'em in two an' they'll be long enough to tie his hands together. Here lemme do it, butterfingers!"

"Butterfingers yoreself!" snarled Tom "I'm doin' this. Get that cayuse out Want me to do everythin'?"

Red, having attained his object, snickered and crossed to the strawberry-roan. He led the horse through the gate, round the corner of the corral and ranged him with the other three animals at the rear.

Red returned to the corral and looked up at the inverted bowl of the star-speckled sky. Then he lowered his gaze to where the black mass of Farewell's buildings cut jaggedly across one side of the bowl.

The town was quiet—too quiet. It was early in the evening, about nine by the clock, yet sounds of roistering were few At the least three or four merry revelers should have been audible, but at that moment Calloway, the bibulous father of Sam Brown Calloway, was the sole individual moved to sing. He was no more than half drunk, either, for he was singing the "Little Brown Jug." Blind drunk, he either sang hymns or prayed in a loud voice

Red Kane would have been better pleased to hear a hymn tune, for the singer seemed to be drawing near. He was coming through the narrow space between the blacksmith shop and Piney Jackson's house.

"The rose is red,
My nose is, too.
The violet's blue,
An'——"

Thud! The singer had undoubtedly tripped and fallen upon his face. He got to his feet, calling upon his Maker, and proceeded at half speed. It is to be supposed that his wake was erratic. Red heard him bump the corner of the blacksmith shop and thirty seconds later fall over Piney Jackson's wheelbarrow, which stood to the left some twenty yards.

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n spite of the seriousness of the situation
l chuckled; then he went instantly
with apprehension, for Calloway was
iout doubt fighting the wheelbarrow.
was one of Piney's valued possessions.
blacksmith might be at home. He
ht come out. He might investigate.
Piney Jackson could not be handled
asily as Bill Lainey. It was borne in
n Red that Calloway must be abolished.
le slid round the corner of the corral
ran full tilt into his brother Tom.
latter grunted, gasped and sat down,
ling his stomach with both hands.
Ah—ow!" groaned Tom, rocking his
y. "Knock-wind—ow-wow-out-o'-mum-
"

he unsympathetic Red did not halt.
continued on his groping way toward
spot where feet stamped and wood
splintering. Lord, if Piney should
ne upon the scene!

Smash! Crash! Calloway lifted the
eelbarrow aloft and brought it down
d upon the ground.

"There, ——," began Calloway viciously.
That was as far as he went with that
tence, for the barrel of Red Kane's six-
ooter smote him across the top of his
roofed skull and he fell senseless upon
wreck of the wheelbarrow.

"Who's there?" demanded a woman's
ce from a kitchen window of Piney's
se.

Red thanked Heaven that it was not the
cksmith making inquiries and oozed
kward softly as a cat.

"Who's there?"

The woman's tone was more insistent.
o her voice was louder. Red turned and
on tiptoe as Mrs. Jackson reiterated
request for information.

At the corner of the corral he found his
ther standing up and in a very bad
per.

"—— of a note!" Tom said in his ear.
y stomach won't be right for a week.
y'n't yuh look where yo're goin' 'stead
oullin' along —— bent and knockin' folks
y? I've a good mind— Whajja wake
is' Jackson up for, yuh numskull? She'll
ll a week now. I s'pose you thought
h'd make my job easier, didn'tcha?"

"I couldn't help it if Calloway was
unk, could I? He'd 'a' fell over Bill
iney before we could move him if I
dn't bent a gun on his head. There,
she's stopped a-squallin' an' closed the
window. We gotta move, Tom. Y'all
right now?"

"Oh, shore. I feel fine. Wait till all
this here's over; I'll make yuh sweat for
what I've gone through. My own barn
too. —— the luck! Lookit here, Red,
the more I think o' this the less I like it.
S'pose now the town goes up. Everythin'
dry as a covered bridge. An' Kennedy's
barn'll catch. S'pose——"

"They ain't no s'posin'," declared Red
as fiercely as whispering would permit.
"We gotta do it my way. She's the only
wagon-track out, Tom. Ain't I thought
it all out? We gotta do it, I tell yuh. We
gotta. The town won't catch. They's a
li'l' breeze, an' she's east. Kennedy's barn
won't go. They'll save her if they work
hard. If his barn does go, it can't be
helped an' he's out o' luck, thassall."

"Aw right, aw right," said Tom. "Lookit
now, you leave my hoss under the cutbank
by the spruce like we said—under the bank,
yuh hear, where they won't be no danger o'
folks seein' him in the light."

"Shore, shore; an' don't wait for me in
them tamaracks more'n a hour. If I ain't
there by then, ride into town. But I'll
be there. Here— Hey, wait a shake,
Tom: Where's the ax? You done forgot
to get me it."

Tom swore under his breath and started
toward the house. In two minutes he was
back.

"Here," he whispered, thrusting the
handle of the ax into Red's hand. "We'd
ought to cut down Telescope's time. We
don't want to wait too long an' we've been
held back a lot awready."

"Can't be did. He's gotta have the full
ten minutes. He can't just get in town an'
then have —— start a-poppin'. She
wouldn't look natural, naw, sir."

"Aw right. You know it all. Have it
yore own way. Ten minutes! Don't talk
to me! Shut up! In ten minutes by
countin' I scratch that match."

Tom melted into the darkness. Red
waited till he heard the gentle creak of an
opening barn door; then he went along the
corral stockade till he came to where
Telescope stood with the four horses.

"All ready, Telescope," he whispered.
"Let's go."

Telescope and his mount vanished like
smoke. Red cocked an ear toward the

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Jackson residence. Hearing no sound, he led the three remaining horses rapidly to his left front till he came to the cutbank above which grew a lone spruce tree. Here, below the cutbank, he tied Tom's horse to a naked root. At the top of the bank, two bridles in the crook of his arm, he paused to listen.

Tuckety-tuck, tuckety-tuck. A horseman was riding up Main Street. The hoof-beats stilled in the neighborhood of the Happy Heart Saloon.

"Telescope," murmured Red, and started onward hastily—but not so hastily as he began to move when some forty-five seconds later a woman's wild shriek tore the silence into shreds. The shriek was followed by others no less wild.

The shrieks came from the direction of the Jackson residence and Tom's corral and barn. Red guessed—and, as he discovered later, guessed correctly—that Mrs. Jackson, on her way to investigate the cause of the disturbance that had broken her early slumber, had stumbled upon the body of the senseless Calloway.

Red, abandoning caution so far as moving silently was concerned, boarded his mount and rammed home the spurs. Behind a tree-checkered fold in the landscape directly in rear of the Farewell jail he dragged his horse to a halt. Encumbered as he was with the heavy ax, Red, because the strawberry-roan he was leading did not stop on the dot, narrowly escaped a trampling.

He made fast the two horses to the trunks of separate cedars and scuttled through the scattering trees up and over the rising ground. As he topped the crest, came a sparkle of light on his right hand. A flicker, a flare, a flame that leaped, and the barn of Tom Kane was ablaze.

"Two minutes ahead of time!" panted Red resentfully and ran a trifle faster.

From where the horses were tied it was a long two hundred yards to the jail, but Red's time for three-quarters of the distance would not have disgraced a trained and fit track man.

Forty yards from the jail, in a discouraged growth of scraggly bushes, Red stopped. There was a lighted window in the rear room of the jail. Red fingered the broad back of the ax-head and waited, his eyes on the lighted window. A long rectangle to the right of the shorter one suddenly sprang into bright relief. Some one had opened the door.

The some one stood in the doorwa The some one was Kansas Casey. Behi Kansas Casey were other men. Red cou not be certain of their number. The ligh and shadows were baffling.

From the direction of the blacksmi shop and the saloon came hearty bawls "Fire!" that quite drowned the screams Mrs. Jackson.

The barn was burning finely now. T flames fed on the dry logs and shakes on match-wood. They whipped up t end wall and snapped across the roof bursts of vivid orange that crackled a coughed and tossed on high their showers sparks.

A little breeze was blowing the spar away from the town but toward Kenned barn. Red sincerely hoped that Kenne wouldn't lose his barn. He had no des to pay Kennedy as well as Tom.

"Dees way! Dees way! We gotta sa de —— barn!"

Red recognized in the stentorian shout t voice of Telescope Laguerre. The ha breed was doing his part exactly by t book.

Against the light of the flames Red sa the figures of running men. The m called and shouted one to another, but ev above their cries sounded the thunderi bellow of Telescope Laguerre, urging, e horting, advising, whooping on the fir fighters.

It was then that Kansas Casey left h post on the doorsill of the calaboose an hurried toward the fire. One of the m who had stood at his back in the doorw followed. The other two—Red could s now that they were but two, and these tw were Billy Bruff and Tom Lumley—steppe outside and stood with thumbs tucked in their belts, gazing at the blaze.

There was nothing to be gained by wai ing longer. Red gripped his ax and sl obliquely through the bushes toward th rear of the two observers.

Nothing is quite so engrossing as a co flagration. Ordinarily wide-awake, har headed citizens of the world become obliv ous to everything but the fascinating flam when watching a fire. So it was with M Lumley and Mr. Bruff. They had not th slightest idea that any one wishing the evil was in their vicinity till a pleasa voice behind them said——

"Reach up an' grab yore ears."

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MR. LUMLEY and Mr. Bruff came alive on the jump. They reached up and seized the lobes of their ears—seized them with enthusiasm, as if they feared the valued organs were on the point of departure.

"Le's slide into the jail now," continued the voice, "an' le's be gentle about it. Le's not have no pullin' at no guns. Mister Lumley will go first. No, wait till I give the word. When Mister Lumley crosses the sill, he will throw up his hands just as high as he can reach. Mister Bruff will do the same. Start, an' don't hurry."

Mr. Lumley and Mr. Bruff entered the lamplit room with careful slowness. They might have been walking on eggs. Under the shepherding of Red Kane they shuffled across the room and alined themselves side by side against the wall.

"I'd stick my hands a li'l' higher, Mister Lumley, if I was you," suggested Mr. Kane.

The Rock County sheriff reached frantically toward the ceiling. Red Kane, although his captives could not see him, nodded approvingly.

"Keep a-doin' that an' you'll be all right," he drawled. "Charmin' Billy with the whiskers will now oblige the audience by takin' off his belt an' droppin' it on the floor—all without malice aforethought an' reachin' for his artillery. You hear me, William."

William obeyed nervously. Belt and gun dropped to the floor with a swish and a thump. William shot his hands aloft without being told.

"Now, Thomas, do like Charmin' Billy done," said Mr. Kane quietly—no one could have guessed from his manner and speech that he stood in peril of his life. "That's right, Thomas. Up with them paws, Thomas! Don't try to gamble with me, Thomas. You'll only try, thassall. 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again,' is one fine rule, old-timer, but it won't work with a six-shooter. I will now pick up yore belts an' guns. Don't move. I can get 'em. Don't turn round. Keep them noses flat against the wall. If they's splinters in the wood, yo're out o' luck. Have yuh got the key to the calaboose door, Thomas?"

"No," growled Thomas.

"Next, Charmin' Billy," pursued the goodnatured voice.

"I ain't got it, —— —— you!" snapped Charming Billy.

"Such language," said Red reprovingly. "You must think yo're at home, Charmin' Billy. I s'pose now Kansas has the key—both keys, inside and outside, huh? He has? It hought that'd be the way of it, so I brought a key with me. Charmin' Billy, step back three steps without turnin' round."

Charming Billy complied with the request. Red Kane tossed the ax past him against the wall.

"They's the key I brought," he continued. "Pick her up an' smash the lock."

Billy Bruff went at his task with vim. He smashed lock and bolt and nosing with three heavy blows and crashed the door wide open. Like a jack-in-the-box Ben Lenton appeared in the doorway.

"Don't turn round," Red Kane reminded Billy Bruff. "Drop that ax an' flip up them hands. Now get back alongside yore friend. Ben, would you mind lookin' in the drawer o' that table an' roust out a couple o' pair of handcuffs? Jake keeps 'em there, or he used to."

Ben Lenton jerked the drawer open and dragged out two clinking pairs of door-hinge handcuffs.

"Stick yore hands in back o' yuh, you two," ordered Red Kane.

Lumley and Bruff obeyed with exemplary meekness. Ben Lenton did his duty. The captives, hands clasped behind them, swayed a little on their feet.

"I know yore voice, Kane," said Lumley "an' I can swear to it. So can Bruff. You needn't think just 'cause you won't let us turn round yo're gonna get away with this."

"I never think," was the placid rejoinder. "I dunno how. I leave that for bright li'l' fellers like you sports. Ben, they's a rope yonder in the corner. I dunno but ——"

Here he suddenly bethought him of the figure cut by Mrs. Jackson when the window fell on her neck the day of the runaway stage teams. He laughed sardonically.

"Here's a better idea," he went on. "Slide over to the window, you fellers. No, the side window. Lay yore Adam's apples on the sill. Go'n, lay 'em down. Whatcha scared of? The sill ain't sharp. That's the boy. Ben, s'pose now you knock out the brace that holds up the sash."

Lenton had the brace in his hand in a split second. The sash—it was a freely

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running window—came down with a *crumph-h*. The snared ones kicked out like bee-stung horses.

"That window moved pretty easy," observed Red, eying it thoughtfully. "Guess we better wedge it tight."

So with the prisoners' own pocket-knives they wedged the window.

"Let's go," said Red, and he picked up the ax.

They went hurriedly. Away to the left they saw, as they crossed the open ground between the jail and the patch of brush, the burning barn flaring redly. There were shouting and noise, and men ceased not to carry and pour buckets of water.

Once past the edge of the brush the stockade of the Happy Heart corral would be between them and the fire and its spectators. When they ran in among the swishing bushes a man rose up from under their feet. Red perceived just in time that it was his brother Tom.

"Next time holler, for ——'s sake!" he exclaimed with irritation, sheathing his Colt. "You might 'a' got plugged."

"Shut up!" was the amiable return. "Keep a-goin'; keep a-goin'."

They arrived among the horses somewhat blown as to the lungs and shaky as to the legs.

"Look here," began Lenton, who till the present moment had said nothing, "look here, gents. I can't say——"

"Don't say it, then," advised Red, earnestly desirous of forestalling possible thanks. "They ain't no time, anyway. You climb on that cayuse there—yeah, the one with the monkey-nose tops—an' ride due east till yuh come in sight of a bald-headed mountain with an easy-slopin' top. That's Triangle Mountain a-stickin' up over where the Fallin' Horse runs into the Lazy. Keep a-goin' an' ford the Lazy above the Fallin' Horse about five miles at the south end of a round-backed ridge. Yo're across the Lazy now an' the ridge is on yore right. From there you'll see three crackin' ol' peaks in a row-like off to the southwest, an' beyond 'em a saw-toothed range. Them three big peaks is the Three Sisters, an' the saw-toothed range is the Three Sisters Range, an' when you get past them three peaks in among that tangle o' mountains an' cañons you'll be as safe as a flea on a long-haired dog. You go there an' stay there. They's plenty deer when yuh run short o' bacon——"

"I put two sides in the off saddle pocket," interrupted Tom.

"So yuh'll make out all right. They's coffee, sugar an' such in the *cantinas* an' ten boxes o' rifle cartridges an' five for yore six-shooter. They's a six-shooter in one of the saddle pockets an' a Winchester tied to the saddle strings. We didn't have no scabbard."

"Gents —" Lenton began again.

"Wait a shake," Red pursued rapidly. "Here's a li'l'calendar. Every tenth day in the month—like the tenth, twentieth an' thirtieth, see—you come down in the foothills along the Fallin' Horse where you can get a sight o' Triangle Mountain. When you see a smoke on top o' Triangle, you come straight home to yore shack by Sweetwater, 'cause everythin'll be all right. Mind yuh now, that smoke may not be the first tenth day, nor the second nor third, an' it mayn't come in the second month even; but it'll come, an' yuh can stick a pin in that. Naw, naw, now. Don't say nothin'. They ain't time. Yo're all right, an' yore daughter's all right, an' everythin's gonna come out all right. Nemmine how. It will. Git aboard, Ben. Djuh remember all them directions? Aw right; git!"

CHAPTER XXIV

ONE DOWN

RED and Tom dismounted among the boulders at the mouth of the little draw where the tamaracks grew. Red dropped the reins over his horse's nose and, lying down on his back, clasped his hands behind his head and stared with half-closed eyes at the stars.

"Lordy," he sighed, "this is somethin' like comfort. I need a rest. I've done been a-workin' my head off since mornin'."

"Har, har!" Tom barked in a repressed tone. "An' har, har, once more. You need a rest! You've been a-workin' yore head off! That's good, that is. An' what have the rest of us been doin', I'd like to know."

"Oh, yuh've done all right," Red drawled. "But, Lordy, Tom, how could yuh help doin' all right? Didn't I plan it out for yuh so careful a two-year-old baby couldn't 'a' made a mistake? Didn't I? 'Course I did. Do I hear yuh say 'yes'? I don't hear yuh say 'yes.' Will, yo're jealous again, thassall. My ——, Tom; if I had

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yore disagreeable nature I'd go drown it' some'ers. Stop jabbin' me in the ribs, yuh Siwash! Ouch! That quirt's got a nail in the handle, an' my ribs ain't iron. If you tear my shirt I'll shore clout yuh one on the snoozer. Lemme alone, will yuh? I'll kick yuh good, I will. Told yuh I would. I'm glad it is yore funny-bone. Serves yuh right. I'll crack the other one next time, an' I'll bet yuh tore my shirt. If I wasn't so comfortable I'd look, an' if it was tore I'd scalp you prompt if not sooner. What was yuh doin' in that patch o' brush, Tom? Why didn'tcha ride straight here?"

"'Cause I didn't know how yuh was gonna come out with them two sharps," replied the somewhat ruffled Tom, rubbing a tingling elbow. "I was squattin' in them bushes ever since Bruff smashed the door down. I'd 'a' come straight in myself, only I knowed I'd do better to watch outside. ——, you was slow! What was the matter with yuh, anyway? Didja stop to make speeches? Hell's bells, I was sweatin' blood with my eyes stickin' out o' my head a foot, thinkin' alla time some investigatin' jigger would sift round the corner of the Happy Heart corral an' I'd have to down him. Didja bring my ax?"

"Shore; she's tied to my saddle strings. Whatcha guess? Think I'd leave it behind?"

"Be just like yuh."

"Where yuh goin'? Lay still, can'tcha? Whatcha wanna scout round for, huh?"

"I gotta bury this ax. They's no sense in totin' her round an' gettin' caught with it. You don't think of everythin', do yuh?"

But Red merely laughed and turned over on his side. When Tom returned from his labor Red sat up and moved crabwise to a concave-sided boulder. Against the grateful curve of the now thoroughly cooled rock he eased his damp back.

"You better go to sleep, Tom," he suggested. "I'll wake yuh up at one o'clock. 'Sno use yore startin' before."

Within two minutes Tom was sleeping—hard.

"Sounds like a sawmill," observed Red, and then, his thoughts drifting to the ranch-house under Sweetwater Mountain, he promptly forgot Tom and his works.

At one o'clock, with the rising moon drenching the face of the land with gray-green splendor, Tom was shaken awake and started off to Farewell. There was nothing dead and alive about the town when he reached it. Some of the inhabitants were roaming the length and breadth of Main Street. Others were congregated in front of the Happy Heart. Still others were grouped round the doorway of Bill Lainey's hotel. Tom heard the voice of Bill Lainey orating to the multitude. He turned his horse's head toward the hotel. Bill Lainey and his cluster of listeners did not perceive Tom's approach till he stopped his horse at the edge of the sidewalk and called:

"'Lo, Bill. What's up?"

"Here's Tom now!" cried Daly, and every individual member of the group whirled to face the street.

"Yore barn's burned down!" supplied "Figgy" Wadsworth.

"Yore strawberry roan's stole!" was the wheezing contribution of Bill Lainey.

"Huh?" grunted Tom unbelievingly, pushing his hat back and scratching his eyebrows. "My barn burned! My roan rustled! Whatcha talkin' about?"

They enlightened him with circumstance and detail. Collectively they offered to show him the ruins of the barn.

"If she's burned down they's no use lookin' at it now," he said practically. "You say somebody hit yuh, Bill, when yuh was comin' to take a last look at the gate?"

"Somebody!" Bill exclaimed. "Somebody! You'd say so! They was six of 'em if they was one an' they all jumped me together! An' I fit an' they fit, but I didn't have no gun an' all I could do was knock down three of 'em. Then one of the others hit me under the ear with a neck-yoke an' I didn't remember nothin' after that till I come to on my dinin'-room table with Lize a-burnin' feathers under my nose an' like to strangled me. ——! My jaw's all swole up, an' I can't open my mouth only just so far."

"Six of 'em—six rustlers," Tom said slowly.

"Six, anyway," Bill Lainey insisted. "Maybe seven. But I'm shore o' six 'cause I counted 'em. An' they was hellions. Calloway, bein' half-drunk, drifted into 'em by mistake, an' they like to beat him to death with Piney Jackson's wheelbarrow. Mrs. Jackson, she heard 'em, but she thought maybe it was just a drunkard or two amusin' themselves, till she come out

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an' fell over Calloway's legs. A wheelbarrow! The gent that can use a wheelbarrow for a club is strong as a hoss. If they was all like that one, I ain't surprized I couldn't lick the bunch. Well, three out o' eight ain't bad."

"Eight," Daly nipped in slyly. "I thought you said seven."

"He said six first," averred Piney Jackson.

"Six or seven or eight, she's alla same," Bill declared with lofty dignity. "I didn't have no time to keep tally o' the whole outfit. But they was six I seen, an' I guess they was more—they must 'a' been to make that Colorado sheriff an' his deputy lay down—an' anyway I licked three of 'em good. Knocked 'em flat, so I did."

"'Colorado sheriff,'" repeated Tom. "What's he gotta do with it?"

A silence fell upon the multitude. Its component parts looked all ways save at the man on the pony. The latter stared, wrinking a puzzled forehead.

"Whatsa matter?" he asked finally.

"Well," Daly said hesitatingly, "they say, them Colorado gents do, that they was held up by several men an' the prisoner took away. I kunno nuthin' about it," he added carefully. "All I know is Lumley an' Bruff was handcuffed an' their heads stuck under the window-sash in the back room of the calaboose an' the prisoner gone when Kansas Casey an' Rouse got back from the fire. I dunno no more'n that."

"You sound like you was apologizin'," derided Tom. "Whaffor? Whadda I care about them Colorado gents?"

"You see, Tom, said Piney Jackson, "them sharps is sort o' sayin' yore brother Red was foreman of the gang that held 'em up."

"They do, huh?" Tom remarked in an ominously quiet voice. "She's shore a calamity Red ain't here to speak for himself. But maybe I'll do. Where are these gents?"

"Lumley an' Bruff are off with Kansas an' a posse after Lenton," replied Piney Jackson. "Telescope's a-trailin' for 'em. They oughta be some'ers round Sweetwater Mountain by now."

"Lumley an' Bruff make two. Where's the Rouse party?"

"I guess maybe he's in the Happy Heart," hazarded Bill Lainey.

Immediately Tom Kane dismounted, tied his pony to the hotel hitching-rail, pulled down his vest and started on foot toward the Happy Heart. By twos and threes Bill Lainey's audience followed at a distance.

Tom, expert in single combat that he was, glanced through a window of the Happy Heart before entering. He located his prey standing at the bar. The prey was deep in converse with the bartender, a stage-station hostler and a few representative townsmen. Mr. Rouse was doing most of the talking.

TOM pushed through the doorway and headed in the direction of Mr. Rouse. The bartender saw him coming and sidestepped out of range. The stage-station hostler was not a breath later in following the example of the bartender. The representative townsmen backed their various ways elsewhere. The eyes of Dunc Rouse widened. Then, at a touch on his shoulder, his eyelids flickered—twice.

He turned slowly, his hands held carefully above the level of the bar, and became aware that the tip of his curiously twisted nose was no more than a foot distant from the hard-set feature of Tom Kane.

The latter's quiet eyes gazed steadily into the close-set, sharp little eyes of Dunc Rouse. A full minute the two men stared eye to eye, and then Rouse could no longer endure that bleak gaze. His eyes wavered, dropped, came back, swiveled right and left and then fixed themselves on the left shoulder of Tom's flannel shirt. The sweat stood out in tiny drops on the forehead of Dunc Rouse. His lips were dry. So was the roof of his mouth. His tongue got furtively to work.

He was not a coward—that is, he was not when he had time to prepare himself for the issue. But Tom Kane had taken him by surprize. Tom Kane had gotten the jump on him and thereby shaken his balance sorely. For the clean courage to go after his gun he would have willingly exchanged all his worldly goods. Yet why should he go after his gun? Tom Kane was doing nothing but look at him.

"What——" began Dunc Rouse and smiled a smile that strove to be cheerful but was merely twisted.

"What's that I hear yo're sayin' about my brother Red?"

"Why——" Dunc Rouse tried again.

"Nemmine any 'whys'!" snarled Tom. "Spit her out!"

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"I didn't say nothin' about him," protested Dunc Rouse.

"You didn't, huh?"

"No, I didn't. What'd I wanna say anythin' about him for? I dunno nothin' about——"

"What's Lumley an' Bruff sayin' about him?" Tom was inexorable.

"Why——"

"Yo're always sayin' 'why' or 'what.' Don'tcha know nothin' else? Can'tcha answer? Aw right, I'll help yuh. I hear that them two hoss-thieves, Lumley an' Bruff, are sayin' my brother Red held 'em up an' busted in the calaboose an' let out Ben Lenton. Is that right?"

"They said so," corroborated Rouse, desperate with fear and shame.

"They're a couple o' liars an' so are you," Tom declared warmly. "An' you don't dare draw that gun."

Dunc Rouse felt a slight sensation of nausea at the pit of his stomach. Being of an olive complexion, his face turned a sickly green. His right arm trembled. It trembled quite noticeably. But that was all it did—tremble.

"Where's yore nerve?" taunted Tom Kane.

The spectators held their breath—some of them. Others looked their scorn and contempt of the pitiable creature facing Tom Kane.

Tom Kane laughed mockingly, reached downward a quick hand and jerked from its holster Rouse's six-shooter. With the other hand he slapped Rouse across the mouth. Dunc Rouse, his lips bleeding, cringing like a kicked mongrel, shrank sidewise against the bar.

Tom Kane inserted his strong long fingers between Rouse's neck and neck-band, yanked his head forward and slapped his jaws again and again. Rouse made not the slightest attempt at resistance. He acted like a man hypnotized by fear.

Tom released his hold on the man's collar, stepped back, set himself deliberately, and knocked Rouse flat. Rouse lay all a-sprawl a moment; then he drew up his knees and shielded his face with his arms as if he feared another blow.

The merciless Tom swung a leg and kicked Rouse three times in the ribs.

"Get up, you yaller pup!" commanded Tom. "Get on yore feet before I drive yore slats in."

Thus adjured, Dunc Rouse scrambled up. Before he could straighten, Nemmie was upon him with fist and boot. Rouse skittered over the floor, through the doorway, across the sidewalk, and brought up under the hitching rail.

A heavy quirt hung conveniently to hand upon the saddle-horn of a pony tied to the rail. Tom Kane slipped the loop of the thong over his wrist, gripped the handle firmly and went at Dunc Rouse in earnest.

He drove the wretched man back into the saloon for his saddle and bridle. These two articles lay in a corner of one of the back rooms. Tom Kane indicated them by the simple expedient of rubbing Rouse's face on the leather.

"Pick 'em up," he ordered, "an' pack 'em out to the corral."

"Ow! Wow! Wow!"

The fear-stricken man broke down utterly and screamed and screamed the while the quirt cut and slashed his flesh unceasingly.

Stumbling, rolling, the great tears running down his face, Dunc Rouse dragged saddle and bridle to the corral, caught up his horse—although how he managed that he never knew—and saddled it.

"Nemmine the hind cinch!" cried Tom Kane and kicked him into the saddle. "One's good enough to hold yuh on." He picked up the dragging rear cinch and cinch-strap and flung them across the saddle in front of the reeling, weeping rider. "Now flit," he said and quirted the horse across the rump.

The animal sprang forward and galloped straight away into the north.

"I guess that settles that," said Tom Kane, gazing after the bowed back of the broken Mr. Rouse. "Piney, didja say the posse went Sweetwater way, huh? Yeah? Well, after we've all had a drink at the Happy Heart, I guess now I'll saddle me a fresh hoss an' slide out thataway myself. I'm kind o' anxious to get back that strawberry roan o' mine."

CHAPTER XXV

THE SHOT

"THEY swallowed it hook, bob an' line," Tom said in concluding his recital of what had happened at Farewell. "They think maybe yo're innocent after

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[illegible] an' Kansas Rumley [illegible] you'll be all right. Gobblemighty, I wish I could be present when he tells it in there in the Happy Hearts Club-room. Done Rouse the town's rush out of the [illegible] got a swell idea the holiday [illegible] Lenton [illegible] I handed the [illegible] 'tween drinks an' they bit like it was corn bread. Before noon, after they've done talked it over good an' plenty, they'll be believin' it for gospel."

"I dunno as I like it," disapproved Red. "They'll think Lenton is in with the road-agents now."

"Let 'em," Tom said confidently. "They think he's a murderer an' a robber anyway; so what's the odds? Where yuh goin', huh?"

"This here draw's shorter by two miles. I know. I've done rode her often enough. Besides, I ain't carin' nothin' about meetin', none o' the Bar S crowd. Leave it to li'l' brother, Tommy old settler. He knows."

"He's got a head like a keg, li'l' brother has—a empty keg. As I was sayin', I'll bet Telescope'll lead 'em on one —— of a party."

"As you wasn't sayin', y'old goat. But I'll overlook the empty keg till we get some place where I can drop a buzz-bug down yore neck if yuh'll tell me some more. So Bill Lainey thought me an' my knuckles was six men an' a neck-yoke, did he?"

"He made it eight men before he got through. By the time he tells you the story it'll be forty men an' a wagon tongue. How you gonna pry the truth out o' Flipup, Red?"

Red ignored the abrupt change of subject. He smiled vacantly and rubbed an ear.

"Yeah," he drawled. "Was Bill's jaw swole much?"

"Not so much as yores'll be if I ever land on it. You heard what I said the first time. How you gonna——"

"Yore cayuse has picked up a rock," interrupted Red.

"Naw, he ain't. How——"

"What's that up there, Tom?" Red asked excitedly, pointing an agitated finger skyward.

"I'd say it was the sun, but I s'pose you got yore own private name for it. Most idjits have, I notice. How you gonna jerk the truth out o' Flipup?"

"Oh, yuh wanna know that, do yuh? Well—— Gimme me a match."

"Finish the sentence."

"Aw, ——, yo're worse'n glue for stickin' to a thing! Can'tcha be contented without askin' fool questions an' botherin' yore betters an'——"

"How—" began anew the persistent Tom.

"I dunno." Red gave up.

"Yuh dunno. Why don'tcha?"

"'Cause I don't."

"Yuh mean to say yo're traipsin' alla way to Flipup an' yuh dunno what yo're gonna do after yuh get there? Yo're a fine specimen, a fi-ine specimen. Where's them four-ace brains you was gassin' about a while back?"

"Nemmine about them brains, feller. They ain't doin' no worryin', so you needn't."

"I needn't, huh? My ——! If I didn't worry I'd like to know where you'd be."

Red opened his mouth to reply—*Cra-ack!* The flat report of a distant rifle smacked the windless air.

"Behind that bald-headed ridge," murmured Red.

"Left o' the blue rock," determined Tom.

Now a gunshot may be entirely innocent of evil, and it may not. Until the precise nature of its intent has been established it behooves the innocent bystander to go carefully.

A brook, bordered by a thick growth of box-elder bushes and a marching line of cottonwoods, lay between the ridge and the two men. They swung toward the little stream, swished through the box-elders and splashed across. Away to their right a narrow draw where slim pines grew gashed the ridge.

They cantered to the draw, turned into it and threaded their way in and out among the tree trunks. The draw widened before them. The trees grew more thickly. When they reached the other end of the draw they were deep in a wood of bull pine, spruce and cedar. Here was no crackling brush to clog their path, and the hoof-beats of their horses sounded softly on the thick covering of needles that blanketed the ground.

Tom, riding a length in advance, tossed up a hand and turned his pony on a dime.

"Horse tied yonder," he said in a loud whisper, jerking his head sidewise.

Red, following the motion with his eyes, saw a black-pointed bay rope-tied to a young cedar forty or fifty yards beyond his horse's ears—saw, too, those same ears cock and the

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horse's head go up. Savagely he swayed back on the curb and effectively dispelled the pony's intention of whinnying.

"Look out he don't whinner, Tom," he warned and, driving in the spurs, sent his mount to the right on the jump.

His brother followed.

A hundred yards away they dragged their ponies to a halt. The quick-witted Red flung himself from the saddle, snatched his Winchester from the scabbard under the fender and thrust his reins into the hands of Tom, who had been slow in dismounting.

"You hold the horses, Tom," said Red, "while I go see what's happened."

Before Tom could protest Red had departed at speed. Tom, burning with outrage, unstrapped his rope and tied both horses to the bole of a high-branched cedar. Swearing at Red under his breath, he jerked out his own rifle and, leaving the horses to whinny or not as they saw fit, he ran after his vanishing brother.

He caught up with him where he had halted behind the thick branches of a newly brought down windfall. The bay horse was not twenty yards away.

"Ain't that Buck Saylor's hoss?" whispered Red.

"Looks like it," was the snappish reply.

"It is," declared Red. "An' here comes Buck."

Hurrying through the wood came the Farewell express agent. A Winchester cuddled the hollow of his bent arm. His eyes roved from side to side. There was anxiety in the puckered forehead. The usually good-humored face was drawn and set.

Behind the windfall Red and Tom sank down upon their haunches. They knew Buck Saylor well, but they had no intention of speaking to him. For at that moment Buck did not look like a man who would give a greeting welcome, and to force oneself upon the attention of another engrossed in his own affairs is to commit a grave breach of cow-country etiquette. Buck Saylor reached his horse and jammed the rifle into its scabbard. He undid the knot of the tie-rope with fingers that trembled—that seemed all thumbs. Continually he glanced over his shoulder, now this way, now that way. It was obvious that Buck Saylor was in a state of mind.

He finished untying the horse, coiled the rope carelessly and hooked it over the saddle-horn. Then, swinging up into the saddle, he returned the way he had come.

The two brothers followed at a distance. An eighth of a mile farther on they came to the edge of the trees. Here, flanked by the easy slope of the bald-headed ridge, was a pleasant, fan-shaped level, grass-covered, dimpled with shallow hollows, that swept away for miles to the foot of blue-green hills. A hundred yards out in the open three or four cottonwoods and a rank growth of red willows and box-elders denoted the presence of a spring.

A thin line of pale smoke, straight as a four-sticker's mainmast and half as tall, pointed skyward beyond the spring. At one side a hobbled horse grazed with quick, regular sidesweeps of his long hammer head. He was so near that they could hear the tearing sound as he wrenched out each mouthful of the thick grass.

Buck Saylor, halting at the spring, was partly hidden by the cottonwoods. Then his horse moved forward a step, and they saw that Buck was leaning over his saddle-horn and looking at something on the ground. Which something, whatever it was, was completely masked by the red willows.

Buck Saylor continued to hold his embowed posture a long minute; then he straightened slowly, wheeled his horse and as slowly rode away. And rode away with chin on shoulder. There was no possible risk of his seeing the Kane boys. Each of them, hatless, was hugging the ground behind an individual spruce, peering with a cautious eye past the bark of his ambush.

"IF BUCK heads toward that notch between the humpy li'l' hill an' the one with the square top, he's goin' back to Farewell," said Red.

"Guess that's where he's goin'," assented Tom as the express agent set his horse to trotting in the direction of the notch between the hills.

"Le's go see what's in them willers?" suggested Tom when the departing horseman had assumed the general outline of a post mounted upon a keg, indicating that he was at least distant the half of a mile.

"No," demurred Red. "Le's wait a shake—till he's a mile out, anyway. Somebody else may 'a' heard that shot besides us."

"Aw, say——"

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"Listen, feller; everythin' might be all right, an' then again it mightn't. No sense in hurryin'. Go yuh ten even they's a dead gent a-layin' near that smoke."

"Ten even is too good. I kind o' think so myself about that gent."

"Make it ten to one, then. Y'ain't afraid to lose one small measly buck, are yuh?" Tauntingly.

"Go yuh," Tom promptly took him up. "But yo're a robber alla same."

When Buck Saylor was a mile away Red and his brother, first lining up the cottonwoods and the willows between them and the rider, walked out to the spring.

"I win," said Red, staring down at the body huddled between a small camp-fire and a bubbling spring, the whole within a horseshoe of red willows.

They knew that the man was dead before they reached him. The position of the legs and arms told as much. As corroborative evidence the soggy, red-stained condition of the back of the man's vest was hardly needed. There was a skillet in which a lump of beef reposed amid already congealing grease, held tightly by the fingers of the man's right hand. Beside his left elbow, where the left hand had dropped it, the contents of a spilt salt sack whitened the grass.

"They say she's unlucky to spill salt," observed Tom matter-of-factly and, being thirsty, he knelt and drank at the spring.

Red turned over the body of the dead man. When he saw the quiet features he sat back on his heels and whistled. Tom got up, wiping his mouth, and looked at the face of the corpse.

"I wonder now," said Red, "what Buck Saylor had against Pickles Dill."

"Dunno." Tom shook his head. "They wasn't never exactly boon companions, but they wasn't hostyle neither."

"Drilled plumb through the ticker," amplified Red. "An' the front of his shirt's burnt. Buck must 'a' made certain shore by shovin' the Winchester almost into his breast pocket."

"Pickles didn't have no chance. Funny he didn't see Buck a-comin'."

"Maybe he did see Buck a-comin'."

"Huh?"

"Maybe he thought Buck was his friend an' wasn't expectin' no such play as this."

"We'll never know, I guess. Might's well bury him."

Using the skillet and Pickles' own skinning-knife as shovels, they cut away the sod and scooped out a shallow grave. They wrapped the body in Pickles' saddle-blanket, laid it in the grave and scraped the earth over it. On top of the mound they heaped a few rocks. This that those ubiquitous beasties, the coyotes, might not investigate.

Pickles' saddle and bridle they lashed to the branch of a cottonwood. Which being done, Red went out to the grazing horse and took off his hobbles.

"Git, feller," he said and slapped the horse on the flank with the leather circlets.

With a squeal and a two-heeled kick the animal galloped away. Red, returning, came to the tiny stream filtering from the spring. As he stepped across, a hoof-mark on the margin of the rivulet caught his eye. This hoof-mark was the imprint of a hoof shod with a bar shoe. Red crawled here and there on hands and knees to find other hoof-marks. He found them, faintly impressed to be sure, but nevertheless unmistakable.

"Whatcha doin'—eatin' grass?" called Tom.

Red rose to his feet and walked back to the spring.

"I just run across the mark of a bar shoe," he said quietly, "an' by the position o' the others I found the bar shoe was on the near fore. The last we seen o' Hollister his gray hoss was wearin' a bar shoe on the near fore."

"What does that prove?"

"Nothin'—yet. It's—it's funny. I can't make it out."

"Lots o' things yuh can't make out. That's nothin' new."

"Well, when Hollister an' them three other jiggers passed us down by them tamaracks south o' Farewell they was headin' south. This could be their first camp."

"It could, but Hollister ain't here an' Pickles is. So——"

"The more I look at this camp the more I don't think she's a one-man camp. Lordy, Tom, where are yore eyes? Lookit all them boot-marks. They're different sizes. One man couldn't 'a' made 'em all. I wish Telescope was here. They ain't nobody like him when it comes to readin' sign. I— Lookit them li'l' tracks, Tom."

"Might a woman made 'em, huh?"

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"She might but she didn't. Hollister made 'em. I mind now how his boots was jomightyful small an' almost new—heels wasn't run over none. They was nothin' fancy about his spurs neither—plain, hand-forged ticklers they was, an' one of the points o' one rowel was busted short off."

"Which ain't got nothin' to do with us nor our job neither. C'mon, Red, for —— sake. Le's drag it."

"Lookit!" cried Red excitedly, pointing an agitated finger toward the evergreen wood. "Lookit!"

Tom looked. A hobbled black horse was issuing from the wood and making his jerky way toward the spring.

"My black cayuse!" continued Red in a healthy bawl and with a fine disregard for possible listeners.

CHAPTER XXVI

ROCK COUNTY MEN

"YES, sir, old feller," said Red, rubbing the black's forehead and pulling his ears, "I shore never expected to see you again, y'old Mormon."

Contrary to the prevailing custom, Red had always made a great pet of the black. And the black meticulously repaid the debt by never bucking except on a frosty morning.

"If you'd only stop fondlin' that fool hoss," remarked Tom with sudden contempt, "yuh might help me roll these rocks off o' Pickles."

"For once in yore life, Tom, yuh got a real shore-'nough idea. We did sort o' overlook a bet when we didn't search Pickles. Where djuh throw that skillet?"

They exhumed the corpse, rolled it out of its blanket-cocoon and searched the clothing carefully. They found nothing but valueless odds and ends, such as tobacco, matches, a pocket-knife and some horse-shoe-nails.

"Lordy," Red murmured disappointedly.

In the business of searching, the dead man's overalls had been slightly pulled up, baring to view a generous six or seven inches of boot above the right ankle. A pronounced bulging on the outside of that same ankle caught Red's eye. He laid hold of the boot at heel and toe and pulled it off. He upended it and two gold watches thudded on the ground.

Observing this phenomenon, Tom pounced upon the other boot and served it similarly. No time-pieces rewarded Tom's effort, but four hundred and fifty dollars in gold did.

"Pickles Dill an' his li'l' friends have been fiddlin' with the road-agent business," said Red, picking up the fallen watches, "an' I'll go you one hundred to one that Pickles knowed plenty about the robbin' o' the express office. My li'l' black hoss proves that."

"You won't do no bettin' with me," Tom assured him. "Yo're too lucky. Any marks on them alarm clocks?"

"Nary a mark. No wonder Buck Saylor downed him. I'd like to know how Buck found out. But why didn't Buck hang round here some'ers an' try to bushwack the others instead o' lightin' out for home? An' why didn't he search him? S'funny."

"Yeah, ain't it? Pull yore end o' the blanket straight, Red, an' we'll roll him up again."

"Wait till I strap his arms in with his belt. They flopped every time we turned him over before. Aw ready yore end?"

Having reburied Pickles Dill, they did not linger in the vicinity. Red fashioned and fitted a hackamore for his new-found pony and led him behind the saddle when they rode away southward.

"Pickles an' Hollister makes two," said Red as the fast-walking ponies rolled the miles behind them. "For a bet the other two, the four that passed us near the tamaracks, was Durkin an' Cox."

"Durkin an' Lenn more like," was Tom's guess. "I seen Cox when I was in Farewell after the fire. He's still stiff in the arm. Shore, I know you run Spunk out o' town, but he could 'a' laid low in the hills some'ers. 'At's what I'd do in his case, an' likely he done it. The foxiness of Durkin an' Cox, the coyotes," he added with a grim laugh, "a-tryin' to saw off the blame for them robberies on Ben Lenton."

"It wasn't foxiness," denied Red. "It was common sense. It was their best play, an' I oughta guessed it sooner. But that's all right now."

"I guess," yawned Tom, who had been losing more sleep lately than he cared to think about, "I guess yes."

It was no part of wisdom to enter any towns in the region. Accordingly they avoided Marysville, Blossom on the

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railroad, and Fort Seymour, by the eminently safe margins of fifteen to twenty miles.

Ten days from the time they left the mouth of the draw near Farewell they rode down the straggling main street of Flipup, in Rock County, Colorado.

In its general appearance Flipup differed not at all from Farewell. There were the same stores and saloons with their false fronts and ill-lettered signs, the same saggy-roofed houses and straggling corrals. But there was this variation between it and Farewell. Where the latter town owned but one dance-hall, Flipup flaunted three before the eyes of pleasure-bent folk.

BRADLEY USHER LENDS MONEY. BUYS ANYTHING. WHAT HAVE YOU?

The above sign, dirty white lettering on a faded black ground, strung its two lines across the entire false-fronted end of a log and shake building with four skylights, situated between two corrals.

"Seemin'ly he don't sell nothin'," observed Red with a barely perceptible nod toward the sign of the House of Usher.

"Lookit the size of his shack," muttered Tom, eying the length of roof visible above a corral stockade.

"Thirty foot wide an' a hundred foot long," mumbled Red. "A gent that buys anythin' has gotta have lots o' room."

"Daisy Saloon, Brad Usher, Prop.," read off Tom, looking under his eyebrows at a saloon on the right flank of the California Store.

"'Brad Usher, Prop.' owns the Pansy Saloon, too," added Red, picking up another sign farther along the street.

"Not forgettin' 'Cards an' Roulette,' next door to the Daisy."

"He's shore one reg'lar two-legged business man. He'll buy whatcha got or lend you money an' then get it back with faro an' licker. Maybe that's the gent now."

A tall, thin, horse-faced citizen, attired in black frock coat and trousers of the style affected by undertakers in good standing, issued from the doorway beneath the "Bradley Usher Lends Money" sign and walked swiftly across the street.

The lean citizen was wearing a high, well-brushed beaver hat. As he crossed in front of Red and Tom, who had halted their horses as if undecided what to do next, he glanced at them casually but with a gaze as intense as that of a wolf. He passed on, and as he went he removed his high hat, took therefrom a long rectangle of plug tobacco, haggled off a stout chew with his teeth and returned the tobacco to the hat and the hat to his head.

Ten seconds later the thin citizen, raising his foot to enter the Daisy Saloon, was run into head-on by a drunken man coming out. The thin citizen, without changing countenance in the slightest degree, seized the person over-served with liquor by the hair of his head and the slack of his belt, swung him waist-high and heaved him into the street.

The thin citizen, one long hand thrust suggestively beneath his coat-tails, stood upon the sidewalk and regarded the liquored individual sprawling in the dust.

That one lay quietly on his face a full minute. His legs kicked once—twice. He squirmed over on his back, sat up and, supporting himself by his hands, bled copiously at the nose. After a time he dragged himself to his feet and, carefully refraining from looking at the man on the sidewalk, staggered limpingly away. Then, and not till then, did the thin citizen enter the Daisy Saloon. It was noticeable that he backed in.

Red and Tom proceeded to the hotel without another word.

"Go yuh ten that quick-tempered lightnin'-rod is Brad Usher," whispered Red, his head under the left fender as he snaked out the cinch-strap.

Tom sniffed his scorn of the proposition, dragged off his saddle and bridle and turned his attention to Red's black horse, which they had converted into a pack-animal. While they worked, came a stocky man who said he ran the hotel, and they caught him eying surreptitiously the brands on the three horses. Whereupon they felt themselves repaid for having spent the better part of the previous afternoon altering, by the method known as hair-branding, the black's Bar S into + S and, in the case of Tom's two horses, the Lazy K into the Barb-Wire.

They carried their belongings into the hotel and bespoke a room. They were lucky enough to get one with but two cots, for they had no wish to be public. And usually the sleeping apartments of the common or garden variety of hotel in that region were public to excess.

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THEY had come into town late in the morning. After dinner, which they ate without removing any of the stubble bristling on their cheeks and chins, they strolled—oh, so aimlessly—down the street to the California Store, which, they had been told by Miss Lenton, was owned by two of her father's friends, the Davis brothers.

They bought tobacco in the California Store but departed without mentioning to the Davis brother that waited upon them their acquaintance with Ben Lenton. That might come later. Red did not believe that to identify themselves with the town's solid citizens immediately upon their arrival would advance their case. In matters of life and death, especially in a locality where life is guarded and death dispensed by the six-shooter, it is always better to know one's enemies first.

Strolling down one side of Main Street and up the other, they took care to enter the combination saloon and gambling-joint bearing the name of Rouse's Rest.

The bartender, a precious-looking scoundrel with a cock-eye, sold them the drinks and cigars they asked for and began to swab the bar industriously.

"Fine day, gents," said he, focusing his cock-eye.

Red walked to the doorway and looked solemnly up at the sky.

"Yeah, it is," was his endorsement when he had redraped himself against the front of the bar. "I dunno when I seen a finer. Whadda you think, Tom?"

"I guess I seen a finer one once down in the Nation. But this here'n ain't to be sneezed at. Barkeep, is they any chance of a feller gettin' into a li'l' game round here?"

"Shore they is," replied the bartender, his features promptly losing the rather blank expression that had come upon them at Red's serious discussion of the weather. "Right in the back room, gents, right in the back room."

"He's a repeater, Tom," said Red, disapproval in the frank stare he switched on the cock-eyed bartender.

The bartender resumed his look of blankness on the instant.

"In there," he nodded, flicking a thumb toward the open doorway giving into the back room.

A man lounged into the doorway. His hands were in his pockets; he wore no hat; his long, narrow head had been recently shingled. Red did not like his cold and fishy eyes, his pale, clean-shaven skin, his pointed foxy nose and chin—there was nothing about the man that he did like.

"They's one of our dealers now," continued the bartender, flirting his cock-eye from Red to the man in the doorway. "He'll fix yuh up."

" 'Walk into my parlor, said the spider to the fly'," quoted Red with a sardonic grin at the bartender. "This is shore handy. Oh, yes indeedy. Ain't it, Tom?"

"Y'betcha. When we want in a li'l' game we'll know where to come for action on our money. Whatsa matter, feller? Whatcha lookin' so funny for? I'll betcha thought we wanted in on a li'l' game now, didn'tcha?"

The bartender, experienced in the ways of drunken men, smiled as pleasantly as he knew how and achieved a most notable leer.

"No, no," said he, "I didn't think nothin' about it. I was just tryin' to help y'out. Take yore time, gents. No hurry. Our back room's always here."

Red frowned doubtfully upon him. He wagged his head in the manner of one far gone in drink. He hoped Tom would have the sense to play up.

"Don't yore back room ever take a vacation?" asked Red, his tongue slurring the words ever so little.

"Never," declared the bartender. "Have another, gents—on the house."

The bartender's cock-eye roved for a fraction of a second toward the man in the back room's doorway. The man lounged lazily to the bar.

"Shake hands with Mr. Stratton, Mr. Dick Stratton," invited the bartender, leering at the two brothers. "Mr. Stratton is one of our prom'nent citizens," he elaborated. "Dunno what we'd do without Mr. Stratton."

Red Kane, stepping forward as if to shake hands, stumbled in a most natural fashion and literally fell on the neck of Mr. Dick Stratton. He did not paw the person of Mr. Dick Stratton to any extent, yet when he had pulled away and given place to Tom he knew where Mr. Stratton kept his gun.

Tom's method was different. He gripped the hand of Mr. Stratton He squeezed it. With his other hand he clung to the forearm of Mr. Stratton. The latter, while

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acknowledging the introduction, endeavored to draw back. But there was no loosening Tom's two-handed grip.

Mr. Stratton was alined with them against the bar. Strong drink was urged upon him. He drank perforce and, the bartender being occupied with a bottle that Red insisted contained a fly, the two brothers seized the occasion to empty their glasses on the floor. The liquor made no pool. There were cracks in the planking through which it promptly seeped. Remained merely a slight dampness on a board or two.

"They's no fly in that bottle," averred the bartender, completing his investigation.

"Maybe he's dove down to the bottom," suggested Red, his voice taking on a thicker edge. "Flies is cute as coyotes, flies is."

"Har, har!" laughed Tom as one who perceives a pleasantry. "Har, har!"

Red yearned to kick him. He feared Tom was overdoing it. For Mr. Stratton's cold and fishy eye was sharp likewise. Suspicion had not glazed it yet, but——

"How about that li'l' gug—game?" said Red hastily. "Whu-why wait?"

Tom smote him between the shoulder-blades with a force that made him blink.

"Shore," he roared, dodging Red's kick. "You got the right idea, old settler."

"But—but we ain't got nobody no play with," said Red, feigning to forget what the bartender had said concerning Mr. Stratton.

"That's easy fixed," pronounced Mr. Stratton, rubbing an ankle, for Tom, evading Red's kick, had severely jabbed him with a spur. "I ain't got nothin' to do just now."

"We—we'd oughta have sus-somebody else," qualified Red.

"Shore," chipped in Tom. "A three-handed game ain't nothin'. I wanna play draw m'self."

"I'll get somebody," said Mr. Stratton and went out.

Within three minutes he returned, in his wake a wizen-faced man with the palest eyes ever a man used to stare with. Wizen-Face it seemed, was another prominent citizen, a Mr. Art Teller. He liked nothing better than playing cards.

The four retired to the back room. On cutting for the deal, Red won. Shuffling the cards, he found that it was a "short-card" deck—that is to say, the ends of certain cards had been filed, thus making it comparatively simple for the crooked gambler to do as he pleases. It is not one of the most skilful methods of cheating and the knowing citizen may detect it, but against the shorthorn and the drunken man it answers the purpose to admiration.

Red knew—knew without raising his eyes—that Mr. Stratton and Mr. Teller were watching him like the proverbial hawks. But Red was not a shorthorn. He was distinctly a longhorn from the top of his red head to the rowels of his Cross L spurs.

He dealt the cards without the flutter of an eyelid. He was careful to deal as the mellowed one deals—with an extravagant gesture or two. Two cards even flipped over the edge of the table into Mr. Stratton's lap.

Red picked up his hand and arranged it with fingers that shook. Red's head wabbled on his shoulder. His body swayed a little. Tom followed his example, adding thereto a loose-lipped mouth and dropped chin.

The ante was small; the bets were small; the pots were small. Red had difficulty in losing ten dollars. Tom won six.

Red drew a twenty-dollar gold piece from his pocket and sent it spinning across the table to Mr. Stratton.

"They's more where that came from," said he. "Gimme stack o' reds."

"They won't be if yuh keep slingin' 'em round thataway," mumbled Tom, uncertain what to say, and resolved to play safe.

What was Red driving at?

"Whadda we care for poverty an' precious stones?" said Red, arranging his chips with drunken solemnity. "We ain't got nothin' on our minds but our hats an' if we wanna buy this s'loon, buy two-three s'loons, we—we'll do it, by ——! Alla same, Tom—" here Red, having drawn a poor hand, dropped his cards face up on the table— "we'd oughta got more for that ranch. The cows was all right—no kick comin' on that price. But the hosses oughta brought a lot more—a lot mum-more. An' I could 'a' got it only you was in a sweat to drag it. 'Oh no', says you. 'We got enough. Why be a hawg?' An' I, like a —— fool, lets it go at that. Gents," he went on, appealing to Messrs. Stratton and Teller, "tut-two thousand more we could 'a' got for that ranch. Think of it, gents! Tut-two thousand whole, hard, round,

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old wheels we could 'a' gug-got if I'd worked it right by holdin' out. When them uh-rich jiggers want anythin' they don't are what they pay. Naw, sir, they'll pend money like it was nothin'. Tut-two housand dollars all wasted—just wasted. Wouldn't it make yuh sick, gents? I'm skin' yuh, wuh-wouldn't it?"

The two gentlemen agreed politely that t would. Mr. Teller smothered a cough. Mr. Stratton felt a warm glow permeating his sinful being. Two thousand dollars more, eh? In that case the total amount paid over for the two drunkards' ranch must have been something worth while.

"Lordy," said Red, looking down at the cards he had dropped, "them cards fell face up, didn't they? We'll deal that huh-hand over."

"We will like ——!" cried Mr. Art Teller, who sat facing Red Kane.

MR. TELLER could never be quite certain how it happened, but the next instant the table edge struck him a violent blow in the pit of the stomach and he went over backward, his chair going with him, and landed with nauseating force on the unyielding floor. Chips rattled about him. Then the table—for Red had continued his primary motion—landed upside down on top of him.

Mr. Teller, who from the first had made earnest efforts to draw his six-shooter, released his grip on the butt and gasped. With a whoop Red jumped on the overset table and danced upon it. Mr. Teller squeaked—he squeaked amain.

Tom, squared back against the wall, yelled with laughter—and kept both eyes riveted on the bartender, who had darted into the back room at Art Teller's initial outcry, and Mr. Dick Stratton. Both men looked uncertainly at Red and the wriggling feet and hands of Mr. Teller. These members were all that was visible of him. For the table was of the kitchen variety and it had gone over lengthwise.

Red took hold of the legs and rocked the table. Then he stamped upon the thick wood and split it from end to end.

"Table's bub-busted!" he cried, grinning foolishly, and drove a spurred heel through the split and ground it into Mr. Teller's abdomen.

Mr. Stratton glanced at Tom. What he saw appeared to satisfy him.

"Gimme the bung-starter," he shouted to the bartender.

"No," said the sharp-eared Tom with decision, "no bung-starter. Leave him have his fun out. He don't mean no harm, Reddy don't. He's just playin' with that jigger, an' he's——"

"He's killin' him!" exclaimed Dick Stratton as Art Teller wheezed faintly.

"Serve him right," was Tom's philosophical dictum. "He hadn't oughta crossed Red when he's drunk. Anybody 'at knowed Red could 'a' told him that. He'll know better next time."

Dick Stratton hesitated. Art Teller was his friend, his accomplice if you like, but Dick was not moved to die for him or run unnecessary risk on his account. And there was risk, judging by the way that infernal person called Tom kept fingering the butt of his six-shooter. It is one of the defects of the great American weapon that it kills for the drunken as well as for the sober, and there is always the probability that the drunken will shoot on small provocation.

Dick Stratton continued to hesitate.

"He'll be through in a minute," observed Tom Kane placidly, not forgetting to sway his body in his best intoxicated manner.

It was the slack hour of the day, but half-a-dozen men, attracted by the yells and thumpings, had stopped in to see the fun. Crowding together in the doorway, peering over each other's shoulders, they watched the fracas with interest. But their expressions remained noncommittal. By which it may be inferred that they felt none too kindly toward Art Teller. Had it been otherwise, there would have been open disapproval. For Red and Tom were strangers and alone.

"Get the marshal, will yuh, Sam?" called the bartender to one of the spectators in the doorway.

"No marshals neither," forbade Tom. "I'm drunk. I know it. So's my brother. But I'm tellin' yuh flat, gents, if any marshal horns into this fracas I turn both guns loose. I'm a peaceable citizen but I don't allow nobody to run no blazers on me. I'll try to get my brother away, if yuh like, but no marshals."

"I wasn't goin' for no marshal nohow," denied the man called Sam. "I ain't lost no marshals. 'Cock-Eye' can roust out his own marshals."

Cock-Eye, who it seemed was the

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bartender, affected not to hear and centered all his attention on Red and the table. Tom approached his brother cautiously. He took hold of Red's shoulder. Red immediately jerked away from him, dropped on his knees, flung aside the remnants of the table and clawed and clutched the throat of Art Teller.

The latter, already finding great difficulty in breathing, went purple as to the face and popping as to the eyes when Red fastened his eight long fingers at the back of his neck and two strong thumbs on his windpipe.

"Leggo, Red!" urged Tom loudly. "Leggo, will yuh? There's a good feller!"

But the good feller was not inclined to do any such thing. He continued to manhandle the unfortunate Art Teller. In which business the front of the wretched man's shirt was ripped in three places.

Red, the pastime palling, ceased choking Art Teller and sat back on his heels—the heels were rooting into Art Teller's stomach at the time.

"Lookit here, yuh lousy pup," he remarked seriously, shaking a lean forefinger in the face of the all but unconscious man, "don't you never tell me I can't do what I wanna do. An' don't you never swear at me neither. I'm liable to lose my temper an' treat yuh rough if yuh do. Say 'Uncle', you wrinkle-faced prune. Say 'Uncle' 'fore I smear yore nose round where yore ear oughta be."

But Art Teller was long past speech. Seeing which, Red got to his feet, wound his fingers in the over-long hair of Art Teller and dragged him out through the barroom into the middle of the street, where he left him to squirm feebly in the manner of the slimy slug when the day is chilly.

Red returned to the barroom—the back room had served its purpose—stood in the middle of the floor and wiped his perspiring face.

"Has that gent any friends?" he asked gravely, looking at Dick Stratton and jerking a thumb streetward.

"Some," said Dick, his eyes narrowing.

"Not that I give a ——," Red continued easily, "only if one of them friends wants to tell that Teller gent he can have anythin' he wants o' me by sendin' word to the hotel, I'd take it as a favor. O' course, if the jigger wants to let the deal drop, fine an' dandy, but I was just thinkin' he might feel I'd abused him or somethin'. You know how touchy some gents are—always lookin' for trouble thataway."

It was wonderful how exercise had sobered Red Kane. There was a dancing demon in his eye but there was no hint of slurring thickness in his voice.

"I'd like to accommodate Teller," he went on. "I was aimin' to leave town tomorrow mornin' early, but I'll lay over another day so's to give him alla time he wants. Six-shooter, rifle, or knife—he can take his pick. I'm a li'l' out o' practise with the six-shooter; still——"

He broke off abruptly and went out again into the street.

He stood upon the sidewalk, all the folk from Rouse's Rest clustering at his back, and looked reflectively at Art Teller where he lay prostrate in the dust, surrounded by seven or eight men. One of the men was holding Teller's head on his knee. This man wore a marshal's star. Tom Kane, leaning with every appearance of unconcern against the wall of the saloon, swore inwardly. Red would surely pull the marshal in. Tom felt it in his bones. This thing was going to wind up in the smoke, and quickly, too. Tom dropped the palm of one hand on the butt of his gun and hooked the thumb of the other into his waistband. For between that waist-band and his shirt an extra six-shooter nudged his hip-bone.

Red folded his arms and stared hard at the marshal. He noted the latter's bulbous nose and slack mouth and was glad. Not that he would have been unwilling to face a man with a stronger fighting face, but he welcomed anything, however trivial, that would make his task easier.

"Might 'a' knowed it," he said to himself. "In a townful o' bad actors the marshal is always a weak sister."

Red shuffled his feet and whistled a few bars of "Old Dan Tucker." This to call attention to himself. He succeeded.

THE marshal laid down Teller's head and stood up. But it was not he who left the group and walked toward Rouse's Rest. It was another man, a heavy-set citizen with bulgy, square, cornered jowls and vicious little eyes set deep in his head, who rolled like a sailor as he stepped along. A stride from the sidewalk he halted.

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"Who done that?" he demanded of the multitude at large, with a backward jerk of the head toward the man in the street.

"Talkin' to me?" inquired Red softly.

"If you done that, I am," declared the heavy-set man in a louder tone than seemed necessary.

"An' s'posin' I did," suggested Red in an even softer voice. "You wouldn't hurt a li'l' feller like me, would yuh?"

"Did you whang up Art Teller thataway?' cried the man.

"What makes yuh think I did?" Red smiled disarmingly.

He was aware of a shuffling in his rear. The crowd was withdrawing from his electric vicinity. It was using celerity, too. Tom alone remained, his eyes roaming everywhere. Of what went on in the neighborhood of Rouse's Rest he missed nothing at all.

The heavy-set man looked at Red a moment. Red looked at him. The heavy-set man made a sudden movement. So did Red. A derringer barked twice. Gray smoke enveloped the heavy-set man—he had halted not four feet from Red. A dropped six-shooter hit the earth with a solid clunk. The heavy-set man sat down suddenly and groaned aloud. One derringer bullet had shattered his right elbow; the other had torn through his right forearm.

Red stood quietly, thin lines of smoke spiraling upward from the twin muzzles of the derringer balanced in his left hand. His other hand lay flat against the butt of his six-shooter.

"Y'all seen it, gents," said he, sidling back to the wall of the saloon. "It was an even break."

"Well—" began the marshal doubtfully.

"Don't say it," cut in a harsh voice from a neighboring doorway. "You ain't ready to die yet, you misguided fool."

From the doorway stepped down the tall, lean, horse-faced citizen with the high beaver hat. He went out into the street, halted a few paces from where Red stood, tucked both hands beneath his coat-tails and gave the assembly of Flipup's inhabitants the benefit of his intense stare.

"It's just as this gent says," he went on, turning his head toward Red an instant. "It was a even break. I seen it. Y'all seen it. It was a even break, wasn't it, marshal?"

There was a sublime contempt, a mordant sarcasm in the tone accompanying the question. Red wondered why. Later he learned why.

"Shore was an even break," the marshal made haste to reply.

The lean citizen nodded, worked his jaws squirrel-wise a moment and then accurately wet down a rock ten feet distant with a stream of tobacco juice. Then he strode briskly to where the heavy-set man was being ministered to by a couple of friends and stopped in front of him and peered at him malevolently.

"You're a fine piece o' work," Red heard him say. "A fi-ine lump o' gullion."

"I— I—" began the heavy-set man, backing off.

"Shut up!" ordered the lean citizen. "Yo're through—understand! Yo're through!"

The lean citizen turned his back on the heavy-set man and walked out to where Art Teller was at last being assisted to his wobbly feet. Disregarding the men that held Art up, the lean citizen hunched a shoulder, swung an arm and knocked Art Teller sprawling. Not content with the simple blow, he needs must kick Art Teller in the ribs.

"Yo're another ring-tail roarer," observed the lean citizen, dealing his victim another kick. "A real howler, ain't you, just like 'Square-Face' Higby? Reg'lar pair o' bad-men, ain't yuh? Yuh make me sick."

He kicked Art once more for good measure and crossed to the sidewalk in front of Rouse's Rest.

"Stranger," he said to Red with a peculiarly mirthless smile, "I dunno yore name but I like yore style. Some time, when y'ain't got nothin' better to do, come see me. Maybe we can talk business. I'm called Bradley Usher."

He nodded in a manner to include Tom and walked rapidly away.

CHAPTER XXVII

SMOOTHER THAN BUTTER

"YOU idjit!" snarled Tom when he and his brother had withdrawn to the comparative privacy of the corral, there to busy themselves ostensibly with the feet of their horses. "What'n —— didja

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have to go wallopin' that Teller sharp for?"

"You didn't notice when he was in that game with us he'd lost the second button off his shirt, didja?"

"No, I didn't."

"Where was yore eyes? Well, anyway, he'd lost her, an' when he slounched down in his chair the shirt bulged a li'l' bit an' I could see right through all the way, 'cause his undershirt didn't have no buttons on it a-tall."

"My ——! What of it? Can't a gent go shy his buttons without you crawlin' his hump thataway? I'd 'a' guessed you was drunk only I knowed you hadn't had enough to razzle a flea. What was the matter with you? Was you crazy?"

"Shore I was—crazy like a fox. If you'd had eyes in yore head instead of a couple o' dried raisins—which they might be for all the good they do yuh—you'd 'a' took notice when Teller's shirt bulged—she only done it once—of a ring he had hangin' round his neck by a piece of string. That ring was a gold ring with three diamonds. What kind o' ring was it Dot Lenton said her Uncle Dick owned which it turned up missin' along with Uncle Dick's share o' the money?"

"Oh," muttered Tom, making believe to adjust a hackamore that did not fit, "I see. Well?"

"I got the ring."

"You got the ring!"

"Shore; in my pants pocket. I took it off him while I was makin' such a show o' chokin' him. Lordy, I was in a sweat! The string was stout, an' I shore had a job to bust her without folks catchin' on. Tom, didn't you guess somethin' was up when I said we'd have to deal that hand over?"

"I didn't think nothin' o' that so much—yo're always playin' the fool thataway, but I shore felt like scratchin' my head when you pushed the table down on him an' wrastled him round instead o' shootin' him. I didn't understand that—it was dangerous. You was takin' too big a chance, at that. You could 'a' worked it the same way with a gun."

"Maybe; maybe not. But I didn't wanna use no gun. I don't want no bullet—leastways not if I can help it—in Art Teller. Unventilated, we might be able to use him."

"How?"

"Thisaway— Here comes somebody."

The somebody was horse-faced Mr. Usher. He approached them, picking his way daintily among the horses in the corral, his high hat on the back of his head, his hands in the pockets of his trousers. There was something almost feminine in the way he placed his feet. When he chose, he could step lightly. In another this would have been ludicrous, but it was not in Mr. Bradley Usher. For it was the lightness and the femininity of the hungry beast of prey.

He nodded civilly to Red and Tom, spread his legs and critically regarded the two horses they were tending.

"Wanna sell that black, stranger?" he said to Red. "The one with the white stockin' in the corner there?"

"I might," was the grave response, "if I owned him."

"I heard you had a good-lookin' black."

The intense gaze met Red's eye and steadied to a straight stare.

"You heard right," confirmed Red. "I got a good-lookin' black. But the accordeen with the white stockin' ain't him. Yonder he stands—him with the Cross Eight brand."

He indicated his own black pony where it stood dozing on three legs.

"I heard he was good-lookin'," grumbled Mr. Usher.

"He is."

"I don't think much o' him." Bluntly.

"You don't have to—not ownin' him."

"No—not ownin' him I don't. I don't—not ownin' him."

Red strove to pierce the blank intensity of those strange eyes to what lay behind. But this he could not do. Mr. Usher's wide, thin-lipped mouth stretched into a toothful smile.

"No," said Red; "not ownin' him like you say, it don't matter what you think, do it?"

"That is a question." Mr. Usher nodded an oracular head. "That—is—a question. Sometimes what I think matters a lot. It depends."

"Yeah," drawled Red; "I guess so."

Again the toothful, wholly mirthless smile.

"I'll be in my office at seven," said Mr. Usher. "I'll be glad to see both o' yuh. Maybe yuh'll hear somethin' to yore advantage if yuh do."

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Mr. Usher nodded abruptly and departed, coat-tails flapping. It was noticeable that now he did not pick his way. He strode along as one who plainly sees his goal. Doubtless he did see it. For the Mr. Ushers of this wicked world are a sanguine breed of folk.

"I ain't none shore about that cheerful-lookin' buzzard." Tom wagged a pessimistic head.

"We're gonna go see him, alla same," Red declared with finality.

"Oh, shore, we gotta, but——"

"We got eyes, ain't we? We got our guns, an'——"

"Hell's bells, that don't worry me. He knows somethin', that long-reached step-ladder does. An' what is it? That's what I wanna know. What is it?"

"We'll find out. There goes the hotel dish pan. C'mon. I'm hungry."

At half-past seven—they did not wish to appear too anxious—they pushed open the door of Mr. Usher's office and entered. In a chair behind a table, his heels resting on the table, his hands clasped behind his head, sat Mr. Usher. He was still wearing his high hat.

"Take chairs, gents," he invited without budging. "They's cigars in that box. Help yoreselves."

They took the chairs but not the cigars. They had no mind to smoke at Mr. Usher's expense. They rolled cigarets instead and looked about them. It was an ascetically furnished place of business, this office. A great safe in the corner, a table, four chairs—nothing more. Not even a calendar hung upon the wall.

"Nice evenin'," observed Mr. Usher.

"Shore," assented Red.

"Kind o' hot," qualified Mr. Usher, jack-knifing his long body out of the chair and going to the window.

"Hot is right. I s'pose now that's why yo're closin' the window."

Mr. Usher tidily placed the window-prop on top of the sash and turned.

"I enjoy a stuffy room," he said and removed his high hat and went through the process of obtaining a chew of tobacco.

It was evident that the operation never varied in method. It might almost have been a rite.

When the hat was back on his head and his jaws were working over the lump in his cheek, he went to the door and bolted it with an iron bolt a yard long and half as thick as a man's wrist.

"Might's well go where we can talk," said he and opened a door in the back of the room.

This door gave ingress to Usher's warehouse—a huge room filled with all manner of merchandise. There were cases of whisky and brandy, crates of china, of tinware, saddles—riding and pack, old and new—straddled racks from which depended bridles and heavy freighting harness in all degrees of repair. There were wheelbarrows, whole companies of miners' shovels, picks and drills. Part of one side was stocked to the roof with cases, some stenciled "Blankets—Bed," others marked "Blankets—Saddle." Next to these cases were seven wide mirrors of the type made and provided for the saloon trade. Cuddling the mirrors was a cook-stove upon which were aligned three copper wash-boilers. Between the cook-stove and three knocked-down wooden beds and their rolled mattresses was a child's cradle. It was manifest that Mr. Usher's sign told the truth.

Through this fantastic agglomeration of commercial articles Mr. Usher led the way to the opposite end. Here a corner had been partitioned off into a room some fifteen feet square.

This room was as slimly furnished as the office. There was a bed, the blankets tumbled, two chairs, a home-made desk covered with a red-chestnut horsehide, and a wash-stand contrived of a packing-case, provided with a bucket of water, an agate-ware basin, a yellow bar of laundry soap and a towel that had at a date long past been white. A bracketed shelf nailed to the wall above the wash-stand held sundry pint and quart bottles and a can or two. One of the quart bottles, the only one wrapped in paper, stood dangerously near the edge of the shelf.

MR. USHER waved his guests to the chairs and seated himself on one end of the packing-case wash-stand. He crossed one leg over the other and clasped his long-fingered hands round a long knee.

Red hooked his thumbs in the armholes of his vest, teetered back on the rear legs of his chair and stared up at the skylights all dusty-golden in the rays of the slanting

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sun. He dropped his eyes to Usher's level, The latter seemed lost in thought. His jaws were working very slowly. He was looking intently at a crack in the floor.

Red's gaze, wandering past the money-lender, skimmed the top of the desk, rested indifferently on a letter file with a naked eight-inch spike, passed on and passed over a small object a foot beyond the file.

Red unhooked a thumb, raised his hand and slowly scratched an ear. This necessitated the turning of his head somewhat and allowed him to scrutinize in the most natural manner the small object in the neighborhood of the file.

This small object was the head, beautifully carved in wood, of an Indian girl. Complete in every detail, this head, while at least three times larger, bore an amazing resemblance to the head Red had seen in the possession of Bill Derr.

Feature for feature the heads were the same; the man who carved them had had the same picture in his mind in both instances as he whittled and cut—and he had been the same man. On that point there could be no doubt.

John Hudson, the desired of the law, had again popped his head above the surface of the sea of oblivion into which he had sunk when Bill Derr failed to identify him in the person of Ben Lenton.

Red ceased scratching his ear, slumped down in his chair and sleepily lowered his eyelids. What connection could there be between Bradley Usher and John Hudson? Perhaps that rat-hole was empty. Mr. Usher might have come by the head quite innocently. It was a toss-up. Red did not know what to think.

"Did yuh know," Mr. Usher began abruptly to Red's address, "that you put the kibosh on two o' my best men?"

"That's tough luck—for them," answered Red, rousing and stiffening.

"Ain't it?" Dryly. "Yuh see," Mr. Usher continued after a moment, "losin' two men thataway sort o' puts me in a hole."

"Yeah? Well, yuh got my sympathy. But I don't guess they're as bad hurt as you think. Art Teller's only bruised a lot, unless you caved in his slats yoreself when yuh kicked him. An' that Square Face boy's only got a couple o' holes in his arm. Give him a month an' he'll be all so fine an' dandy. Anyway, why bellyache to me?"

"When yuh know me better, stranger," was the unmoved response, "yuh'll find out I never bellyache, not never nohow. Square Face'll never use that arm again; leastways for gun-fightin' he won't. Doc Alton says she'll be stiff till he cashes. But that ain't what's botherin' me. It's their nerve. They've been licked, the both of 'em, an' licked good—Art has special. From now on they won't have the guts they had before. Square Face showed he wouldn't stand the acid right after he was shot. Yesterday I couldn't 'a' talked to him like I did without a battle. Today he quit cold. An' I'm gamblin' Art Teller will be even more meachin'.

"Them two sports you run yore brand on was a heap useful to me. I didn't keep 'em so busy they didn't have time to enjoy 'emselves none, but when they was workin' they chawed up sixty minutes every hour. I need two men in their places."

Mr. Usher paused, disentangled the hands clasped on his knee and closely examined his finger nails. The inspection proving satisfactory, he reclasped his hands and looked at Red and his brother.

"Meanin'?" inquired Red.

"She's yore move."

"I ain't played checkers for so long I 'most forget how—but s'pose now we don't wanna move?"

"I pay one hundred a month an' keep at the hotel."

"I guess maybe the work ain't punchin' cows."

"Not so yuh could notice."

"Just what might it be?" asked Tom flatly.

"Obeyin' orders."

"Oh, yeah," said Red, "that's fine, but we gotta know what yo're figgerin' on us doin' so's to earn a hundred a month."

"Ain't you kind o' partic'lar?"

"Depends on where yuh happen to be sittin'. From here we ain't a bit partic'lar."

"Maybe, but I still think yo're kind o' partic'lar alla same—kind o' partic'lar for folks ownin' three hair-branded hosses."

Red leaned back in his chair and slapped his leg and laughed and laughed again. So likewise did Tom, but not so loudly.

"Y'old fox!" exclaimed Red when he could speak. "Might 'a' knowed we couldn't fool you. Yuh gotta admit that hair-brandin' was shore one work of art."

"All o' that," nodded Mr. Usher. "It

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would look all right to most people, but my eyes are pretty sharp—pretty sharp. I don't know what yore business is, an' I don't wanna know—keep right on with yore fairy tale o' sellin' a ranch—an'—"

"You must 'a' been talkin' to Cock Eye or that Stratton gent," Red interrupted accusingly.

"They was talkin' to me. What difference does it make?"

"None a-tall. We're all li'l' friends together. Oh yes, indeedy. An' we didn't sell no ranch, huh? You hear that, Tom?"

"She must be true," grinned Tom. "The gent says so himself."

"Yeah. Well, as the gent was just gonna say, here's two jobs open for two partic'lar gents to wrastle with while they're waitin' to sell another ranch. One hundred a month apiece, keep an' pickin's. All you gotta do, if yo're still so set on knowin' beforehand, is look out after my interests. I got several."

"I noticed that," said Red.

"Yore eyes are most as good as mine, an' lookin' out after my interests will shore keep 'em good. In my business yuh can easy see how me an' other gents mightn't always hit it off. Most folks is stubborn as mules an' can only see one side of a argument. An' they gotta be showed. It ain't always convenient for me to do the showin'. I gotta spend most o' my time right here in town or at the Empire. I can't be ridin' the range alla time collectin' what's owin' me."

"An' we're to do the collectin', huh?" Red smiled broadly.

"You'll see that it's done," Mr. Usher replied ambiguously, "an' you'll keep me from bein' gouged out o' my rights by slick fellers with rough corners. O' course, yuh can't always skin a two-legged calf without killin' him."

"As a rule yuh can't," admitted Red.

"Yuh get the idea. Get this one: I don't wanna see no two-legged calves downed unless she's necessary, an' you'll be the judge o' what's necessary, but any time yuh gotta beef one you get one hundred dollars bonus."

"Apiece—no matter who does the killin'?"

The callous devil nodded. Red did not dare look at his brother. He rolled his eyes upward and puckered his lips and whistled a nameless tune.

"Oughta be more," said Red suddenly. "This here's a new layout for us, an'——"

"Say one hundred an' a quarter apiece," chipped in Tom.

"That's only two fifty per calf," said Red. "Dirt cheap."

Mr. Usher chewed a while in silence. Finally he nodded.

"All right," said he. "I'll go yuh. What may I call you gents? Red Carey an' Tom Carey? Brothers, huh? An' that ranch yuh sold—where didja say it was?"

"We didn't say," smiled Red.

"My mistake. I thought yuh did. It don't matter—not a-tall. But that Cross Eight black pony is sort o' interestin', kind o'. That might 'a' been the Bar S brand at one time."

"Meanin'?"

Red's tone was cold as a blizzard. His eyes were colder.

Tom's chair creaked as the sitter moved ever so slightly.

"NO OFFENSE, gents," Mr. Usher said calmly. "But if that Cross Eight pony was ever a Bar S hoss—yuh needn't go huntin' for nothin' hostyle in them words, 'cause nothin's meant—I'm only thinkin' yuh can tell me somethin', maybe."

"Then come to the point," Red advised him sharply. "No need to travel ten miles to go two."

"Have you lately been in Fort Creek County in ——." Here he named the territory.

"We might."

"Might you have been in a town called Farewell?"

"We might 'a' been there too."

"Might you have cut the trail anywhere o' three gents—a sheriff named Lumley, an' his two deputies, Billy Bruff an' Dunc Rouse?"

"We might 'a' done that. We ain't partic'lar what we look at. Sheriffs, deputies, marshals—they all look alike to us." The sardonic devil in Red's gray eyes leaped and danced and made merry. "Shore we seen 'em—them three you mean. An' I'll say I never saw gents so out o' luck in all my life."

"Out o' luck?"

"Yeah—gamblin'. The sheriff, Lumley, bucked the wheel one night an' quit six thousand loser. Tried to win her back the

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next night an' dropped three. Went to it again an' inside o' one li'l' hour he went shy a thousand odd an' quit broke. He never played no more after that. But the other two, they played. I guess yes. I've seen gamblin' men, but them two could give any gamblers I ever seen the first bite an' win with one hand tied. Mornin', noon an' night—draw, stud, blackjack, faro, roulette, anythin'. They'd even chuck dice for a change.

"They didn't lose so much as the sheriff—thousand or fifteen hundred apiece maybe. They was still hard at it when we left town. Seemed to be well fixed for cash."

Mr. Usher's expression as Red unfolded this sordid tale did not change. But the knuckles of the hands gripped round his knee were bloodless when Red stopped speaking.

"They went north to bring back a murderer who had settled near Farewell," remarked Mr. Usher quietly. "Did they catch him?"

"Aw, you mean Lorimer, out there by Sweetwater Mountain. We heard all about that. Shore was a joke on them fellers. They arrested him all right, but he got away while they was bringin' him to Farewell. Hell's bells, I dunno what was the matter with 'em. Three gents all organized with six-shooters an' Winchesters, an' the prisoner drags it easy as yuh please. I'll bet if Jake Rule or his deputy, Kansas Casey, had been along he wouldn't 'a' made it, not by a jugful. I ain't got no special cause to be friendly with either Sheriff Rule or Kansas, but I'll say this for 'em—they don't lose no prisoners."

"Didn't they try to catch Lenton? Lenton's his name here."

"Aw, they tried," drawled Red, contempt rampant in his tone. "But you don't catch no prisoners playin' the wheel."

"They was out with a posse two or three days, I heard," contributed Tom, fearful that Red was coming it a bit thick.

"Yeah, an' rode the range to the south an' east—just where he wouldn't go. Too many ranches thataway. Northwest now—that's where they should 'a' gone. Take it from me Lorimer—or Lenton—rode northwest or north. Maybe he went as far north as the Dogsoldier or Paradise Bend. Once you let him get in the Gov'ment Hills yuh might's well wave yore hat good-by. Yuh'll never see him again."

"Maybe he headed for the Three Sisters," suggested Mr. Usher.

"He might," admitted Red. "Yuh never can tell."

"Was it before or after the arrest an' escape o' Lenton that Lumley an' his two friends began to gamble?" This Mr. Usher, staring at Red.

"After," was the prompt reply. "Leastways, if they gambled before we didn't hear about it."

"I see," murmured Mr. Usher. "I see."

He rose to his feet, yawning widely, and stretched with much standing on tiptoe and twisting of long-muscled arms. One arm in its sweep jogged the paper-wrapped quart bottle which stood near the edge of the shelf above the wash-stand. The bottle tottered to a fall. Mr. Usher, reaching quickly to save it, misjudged his distance, smacked it with his knuckles and sent it spinning across the room, to smash itself to bits upon the red-chestnut horsehide that covered the desk.

"——!" remarked Mr. Usher, tearing the back from a writing-pad and brushing up the sopping mess of torn paper and broken glass. "I guess that'll be all for now, gents. S'pose you come see me in the mornin'. I may have a li'l' jag o' work for yuh."

CHAPTER XXVIII

A CHECK

"MY ——, Red!" whispered Tom in Red's ear. "You've done took too big a chance. You've sp'iled the deal, I know —— well. S'pose they write back here and tell him just how Ben Lenton did make his escape? S'pose they do, huh?"

"They won't," returned the serene Red. "They won't dare. How'd they look tellin' how they was held up an' handcuffed, an' the window-sash dropped on their necks? Shore, I know they got a long tale of a gang an' all; but at that the way they acted don't show up none too well. You see what Usher's like, don'tcha? He wants action, not excuses. Djuh think they're gonna hand him any excuses? They are not. They'll keep what's happened under their hats a while, y'betcha."

"Maybe yo're right. Once in a year or two yuh are. That notion o' tellin' about them three sports gamblin' was slam-up

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ight. Just what I was gonna tell him yself if you hadn't."

"You couldn't 'a' worked out a idea like at in a million years—two million, by —! Notice how he swallowed it? Easy well, I'd tell folks so."

"Will it start Usher north? That's the xt card in the pack."

"I dunno, but it'll start business a-ovin'. Usher ain't the gent to sit still ' suck his thumbs when he's bein' razzle-zzled. Naw, sir, not that long-legged ep-ladder. Give him time to think it out ' get it sot in his mind that Ben Lenton ve them three jiggers the thirty thousand be let off, an' things are gonna move, ou hear me whistlin'. An' when they o get a-boilin' good, it'll be a shame if ou'n me with our li'l' spoons can't skim methin' off the top."

"It'll be worse'n a shame. We'd deserve nchin'. I wonder what he takes us for—oss-thieves?"

"An' road-agents most like. He thinks re're bad as him, anyway. Gawd, what stinkin' polecat he is! Makes yuh wanna pit every time yuh think of him."

"One thing, he wouldn't renig at killin' Dick Lenton, that's a cinch."

"He wouldn't renig at nothin' so it was ow-down, the skunk. Notice anythin' par-ic'lar on that desk o' his, Tom—over beyond the letter-file?"

"From where I was sittin' them long knees o' his was in the way. What was it? Huh? A Injun head like what Bill Derr had? That's—shore—a odd number."

"Ain't it?"

"What's it mean?"

"It don't mean nothin' good, an' yuh can stick a pin in that."

"I'm gonna go stick my head on a piller. C'mon."

"Not me. I gotta stay right here so's I can watch the corral where Mister Art Teller keeps his hoss. I wanna whisper somethin' in his ear before he leaves our middlin' midst."

"I s'pose he will be slidin' out," said Tom thoughtfully.

"Soon's he can, y'betcha. He ain't a complete fool. Lookit! That's him now."

Faintly visible in the semidarkness, the figure of a limping man approached the corral gate. The man was dragging a saddle. They could hear the leather squeaking.

The man opened the gate, passed in and pulled it to behind him. Sounded then a scurrying and a plunging within the corral. The startled horses were enlivening the occasion. A rope slapped against the stockade. The man had missed his cast.

"Hear him cuss," whispered Red in delight. "He's friend Art, all right."

Ten minutes later Teller, leading a saddled horse, issued from the corral gateway. Turning round from fastening the gate, his peace of mind was rudely disturbed by a prodding at his ribs. Art Teller, his biceps cuddling his ears, went painfully stiff on the instant. He knew a gun muzzle when he felt one.

"Le's go where we can talk," invited the voice of the man who had beaten him.

Art Teller was moved to accept, if not gladly, at least with alacrity.

"I'll just take yore gun," whispered Tom and took it, carefully patting the captive from knees to neck in search of a possible hide-out.

Within ten minutes Art Teller was squatting on the ground under a cottonwood tree a quarter-mile out of Flipup. Facing him Red and Tom sat on their heels. Tom held the reins of Art's horse.

"Why you leavin' town?" asked Red.

"I got business," replied Art Teller sullenly.

"Shore I know yuh got business. Everybody's got business. We got business, too. An' my business is findin' out where you got that three-diamond ring."

"So yo're the gent—" began Art Teller hotly and stopped.

"I'm the gent took it off yore neck, if that's what yo're gettin' at, feller. That ring was stole from me six year ago over in Cheyenne, Wyoming, an' I wanna know where you got it."

"I didn't take it off o' you, anyhow," was the sulky reply.

"Maybe not. Where didja get it?"

"It was give to me."

"Who by?"

"A friend o' mine."

"What's his name?"

"He's got different names. S'pose I show yuh his picture. How'll that do?"

"If yo're thinkin' on gamblin' with us," said the suspicious Red, "think again."

"Not much I ain't," was the fervent declaration. "Picture's in my vest pocket with some letters. Here, feel for yourself."

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Red felt.

"Yank her out," said he, satisfied.

Tom's six-shooter had been trained on Art Teller from the moment he sat down. Red, on the other hand, trailed his gun across his thigh, the barrel pointing at the ground. He reached up to his hat-band for a match.

For all the starlight was bright, it was dark enough under the cottonwood. The dimly outlined Mr. Teller pulled a whitish packet from an inner vest pocket. The component parts of this packet he shuffled as one shuffles a pack of cards. Then thumbed them over slowly.

He finally selected one and laid it on his knee and smoothed it flat with the palm of his hand.

"Here," he said, an odd quiver in his voice, "got a match?"

Red leaned forward and scratched the match. At the instant of its flaring alight, while his eyes were temporarily dazzled, Art Teller swung his right arm and struck Red a stinging smash on the cheek-bone. Red toppled over straightway against Tom, knocking the latter off his balance and sending his well-meant and better-aimed bullet wide by a yard.

For a citizen who had recently received a thundering manhandling Art Teller's exhibition of swift action was marvelous. He was coming to his feet as he struck the blow at Red. He did not strike again but dived headlong for his reins, scooped them from the ground where Red had dropped them, started his horse on the jump and swung up with the animal going full stretch.

Before Tom could fire again the greatly chagrined Red drove the heel of his hand hard down on Tom's hammer-cocking thumb.

"Don't shoot!" he commanded. "Yuh might kill him."

"I was countin' on doin' that," rejoined his brother, angry and nonplussed. "What in ——'s the matter with yuh?' '

"Nothin', but they's somethin' the matter with you, you squallin' idjit! We gotta find out somethin' from this gent—if he passes out, we can't."

"We can't anyway," Tom snarled bitterly. "Listen to them hoofs, will yuh? He'll be a mile away in a shake."

"Can't help it, Tom. I tell yuh we can't run no risk o' downin' Mister Teller. So far he's the only gent we got any real evidence against. We'll find him again, don'tcha fret. Say, ain't I got a right to feel worse'n you do? It was my fault he got away. Hell's bells, Tom, you won't never catch no fish if yuh go on cussin' like that."

THE following morning, while they were soaping their faces at the wash-bench outside the hotel kitchen door, two horsemen trotted past, heading toward the corral. Red, winking the soap from his smarting eyes, perceived with amazement that the elder of the two riders was Bill Derr, the younger Bert Kinzie, one of the 88 punchers whom his brother Tom had perforated while playing even for his—Red's—wounding.

Red's gun and belt were hanging together with Tom's on a nail above the wash-bench. Red leaped. As his fingers closed on the friendly butt he heard above the snapping crackle of frying bacon in the kitchen a smack and a click at his back. Lord, the other had beaten him to it!

But no shot followed. Even as he whirled to face whatever might betide he heard Bill Derr saying quietly:

"I don't see nothin' to get hostyle for. I say I don't see nothin' to go on the prod about."

Red, his gun poised, saw that Bill Derr, crowding his horse against that of his companion, held Bert Kinzie's hand motionless on the butt of his half-drawn gun. Bert Kinzie's sunburnt face was set and drawn, the lips curled in a snarl, writhing away from the clenched teeth, the veins in his neck swelling as he strove with every atom of strength in his tight-muscled body to free his hand and gun.

Red, tensely immobile as a cat at a rat-hole, waited. He could afford to wait. He held the other's life beneath the cocked hammer of his gun.

"Now, now," soothed Bill Derr in a low tone; "don't be a —— fool, Bert. Don't be a —— fool. Don't yuh hear me sayin' they ain't nothin' to get hostyle about."

"Djuh want me—" furiously began the straining Kinzie.

"I want yuh to keep still," cut in Bill Derr. "Shore, I see what you see—see 'em plain, both of 'em. It's all right, I tell you, it's all right."

"But——"

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"Who's runnin' this, Bert?" persisted ie quiet voice. "You take my word for that everythin's all right. If it ain't, ll be the first one plugged. I'm between ou an' him. Yo're sort o' behind me nataway, Bert. Sort o' usin' me for a reastwork like. No need to get het now; o need to get het. That's the stuff. Tuck ore artillery back in camp. Le's unsaddle ow. Good idea, huh?"

Bill Derr, taking care to keep his long ody between his companion and that ompanion's enemies, pressed on to the orral gate. Red dropped his gun hand t his side and glanced sidelong at his rother. Tom, soapy water dripping from is chin, held a towel in one hand and a six-hooter in the other. He turned a puzzled ace toward Red. Behind them in the itchen the breakfast bacon snapped and rackled.

"What in ——?" muttered Tom.

Red shook his head. Slowly he put away is gun. Tom followed his example. Red roceeded to finish his ablutions. Not so Tom Kane. The latter swiped the towel nce across his wet features, slicked his hair lat with the palm of one hand and put on his hat and cartridge-belt without once removing his narrow-slitted eyes from the igures of Derr and Kinzie.

It was obvious that Bill Derr was still endeavoring to show Bert Kinzie the error of his ways. The latter, his back eloquent of sulkiness, listened in silence.

A few minutes later Derr and Kinzie, carrying their saddles, walked toward the side door of the hotel. Kinzie looked straight before him. Derr's washed-out gray eyes glanced at Red and Tom standing at the kitchen door and passed on to view the distant hills.

"We'd oughta get a good bunch at the Rafter O," Bill Derr was saying as he and Kinzie passed the brothers. "Startin' at nine, say, we'd oughta reach there by four o'clock. Yeah, at nine," he repeated, as if the silent Kinzie had asked a question. "We'll start at nine on the trail to the Rafter O."

The two men went in by the side door. Red looked up and down the dusty irregular stretch of ground between the rear elevations of the houses fronting on Main Street and the straggling row of corrals. At the other end of town a freighter was harnessing his mule-teams. Three corrals nearer a woman was milking a nervous nanny-goat. But the freighter was too far away to have seen anything out of the ordinary and the milker was not sufficiently near to have heard a word, and furthermore her back was turned toward the hotel.

Red poked his head round the jamb of the kitchen doorway.

"How's breakfast comin'?" he asked in a conversational tone.

The sound of the frying bacon was so loud that he had to raise his voice and repeat the question before the cook heard him.

"He didn't hear nothin' outside, that's a cinch," Red told himself. "O' course, they's all them back windows, but she's pretty early, an' anyway a gent would have to see an' hear both to make anythin' out of it. Tom," he said aloud to his brother, who stood scratching his head and staring stedfastly at the side door of the hotel, "Tom, I guess you'n me won't go see Friend Bradley till after nine—some time after. Le's go in an' eat."

"Shore," assented Tom, and he licked his lips and saw to it that the extra gun behind the waist-band of his trousers could be drawn easily.

It was an odd meal and a most uncomfortable one, that breakfast. Bert Kinzie and Tom Kane watched each other like weasels. Red Kane, despite his faith in Bill Derr and the latter's restraining influence over Bert Kinzie, hardly tasted what he ate and drank.

The hasher wondered why four of the guests manipulated their table cutlery with their left hands only. But she was newly come out of the Corn Belt, where the law was revered as a fetish even in those days. The other breakfasters were too busy gobbling and guzzling to observe aught that lay beyond the rims of their finger-thick stoneware.

Bill Derr and Bert Kinzie finished before Red and Tom and kicked back their chairs and withdrew to the street. Red piled his plate, saucer and cup with a heartsome feeling of relief, retrieved his hat from beneath his chair and twirled it upon the point of a stiff forefinger. As they were about to leave the table, the landlord slouched in from the kitchen to help the hasher clear away. Red fixed him with a hard eye and hummed:

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"We'll hang old Santa Anna soon—
Wa-hoo, wa-hoo!
An' all the Greaser soldiers, too,
To the tune o' Yankee Doodle Doo,
'Way down in Mexico."

The landlord glanced askance at Red and brushed against him as he passed. His head gave a slight jerk forward. He stacked a dozen plates and saucers and shuffled back to the kitchen.

"Old Rough an' Ready, he's a trump,"

sang Red, swinging full stride into the air.

"Wa-hoo, wa-hoo!
He'll rub old Santa Anna out
An' drive the greasers in a rout,
'Way down in Mexico."

Tom shoved back his chair. Red trod upon his brother's toe and started toward the kitchen. Tom followed. They found the landlord awaiting them outdoors by the wash-bench. He grinned at them with all the confidence in the world. They did not return the grin. Somehow Red was reminded of a sleek cod head he had once seen in an advertisement.

"The cod's eyes popped more," remarked Red thoughtfully, solemnly contemplating the landlord.

"Huh?" gawked the landlord uncertainly, his grin fading.

"Nothin'," was the reply. "Yuh wouldn't understand. Whadda yuh want?"

"Djever see that tall feller with the gray eyes before?" asked the landlord, looking a trifle dashed. "The oldest one o' them two just got in, I mean?"

"Now how in —— djuh expect me to know all the fly-by-nights in the country?" demanded Red rudely. "I ain't no cylophobia."

"Yuh dunno him, then?"

"Ain't I just said I didn't?"

"All right, all right, I was only a-askin'. No offense meant. Dunno whatcha gettin' hot for. Brad Usher said to me last night——"

"Nemmine what he said," interrupted Red. "If he was talkin' to you last night, then I guess you an' us understand each other without havin' to chat about it. Whyfor is this tall feller worryin' yuh?"

"He ain't—exactly. But I seen him before some'ers."

"What o' that?"

Red stared at the landlord. What was going on behind that mask of sleek and oily features? Was there more than a surface meaning to what the man was saying? Had he witnessed the incident of the early morning?

"What o' that?" Red repeated.

"Nothin'; only I can't remember where I seen him."

"An' what o' that too? You talk like an old woman."

The landlord, whose name was Skinner, wagged a dogged head.

"I tell yuh I don't like it," he insisted. "I seen that feller some'ers. I can't remember where or how, but I'm bettin' he's a United States marshal or a detective or somethin'."

"How about the other feller? Is he a detective too?"

"I dunno. I know I never seen him before."

"If they're detectives, whadda yuh think they're doin' here? Ain't Flipup a model Sunday-school or what?"

"Yo're friends with Brad Usher same as I am," was the careful answer. "Flipup is Flipup, an' we don't want no sneaks lallygaggin' round stickin' in their noses where they ain't wanted. An'—we—ain't—gonna have 'em."

"Tell yuh what," suggested Red, "s'pose now you just slide up to one o' them fellers, the tallest one for choice, an' call him a sneak. I'll bet he wouldn't do nothin' more'n take off his hat to yuh. He might even say 'Thank yuh.' You can't never tell. Take a chance, feller, take a chance."

But the stocky landlord was not taking any chances that morning. He retired to the kitchen without another word.

Red and Tom, grinning from ear to ear because they did not feel in the least joyful, went in to get their saddles.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE STAIN

"I KIND o' thought you'd take the hint if I talked loud enough," said Bill Derr, checking his horse and looking over a cutbank bordering the trail to the Rafter O.

"Yeah," smiled Red, sitting his horse under the cutbank, "takin' hints is where we live, Tom an' me. How about yore

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friend Bert behind yuh there? Is he——"

His smile broadened as he left the sentence unfinished.

Bert Kinzie glanced at Tom Kane where he stood motionless at his horse's head.

"We-ell," began Bert hesitatingly and then stopped as Bill Derr hurriedly cut in with: "I told Bert, Tom, just as I'm a-tellin' you now, that pursuin' this feud o' yores to the bitter end is —— foolishness. Bert's got yore trade-mark on him in two places, an' I notice they's a scar alongside yore head you didn't get shavin'. She's a stand-off thataway, an' both gents deserve great credit. Besides, fellers in the same line o' business hadn't oughta quarrel nohow. If they do, the business goes to —— quick an' soon, so——"

"Same line o' business," interrupted Tom, his features immobile. "How yuh mean?"

"I got an idea yo're down here after what we're after."

"Huh?"

"The road-agents."

"The road-agents?"

"Shore. The company hired me to go get 'em—they's a reward, too—an' the 88's offerin' one for their money, so Bert Kinzie come along to help on that. Ain't you a-tryin' to see what you can do on yore own hook?"

"We're always glad to make an honest dollar," equivocated Red with a leer. "But what have the road-agents gotta do with Flipup, Colorado?"

Before Bill Derr could reply, came the faint report of a rifle and Bert Kinzie's horse, scored across the rump by a bullet, jumped straight over the cutbank. It was purely fortuitous that Tom Kane stood directly in its path.

Tom leaped aside, but the horse's shoulder caught him in mid-air and knocked him spinning. The horse crossed its legs and fell. Bert Kinzie shot over the saddle-horn and landed on all fours. He scrambled to his feet just in time to seize his potential enemy by the collar and drag him beyond leg-sweep of the stung and frantic animal. As it was, a flying hind hoof whisked Tom's hat from his head.

Tom sat up, supporting himself on two shaky arms, and blinked at Bert Kinzie, who had sprung back to his pony and was dragging it to its agitated feet. Tom rubbed a slightly dazed head and looked from Bert Kinzie to those furiously kicking hooves. Slowly he got to his feet, retrieved his hat and walked up to Bert Kinzie and tapped him on the shoulder. Bert seized his reins short and turned to find Tom holding out a most amicable hand.

"Shake," said Tom. "I don't cut down on you no more, an' you can gamble on that."

"Which that shore goes double," Bert declared instantly, and he heartily shook Tom's hand.

"Set 'em up in the other alley!" bawled Red, who was holding Tom's thoroughly frightened horse and having a time with it. "Come an' get this locoed pinwheel o' yores before I bust his jaw for him, will yuh, Tom? Where's Bill?"

Bill Derr was nowhere in sight. He had vanished like a handful of smoke on a windy day. But five minutes later he appeared at the mouth of a draw a hundred yards away and waved them to come to him.

"If we slide down this draw," said he when they loped up, "we'll be out o' sight complete o' that sharpshooter."

"Where's he shootin' from?" asked Red, wheeling his horse. "That hill over yonder?"

"That hill," replied Bill Derr, leading the way at a gallop. "An' they's two of him."

"Two!"

"Two, y' betcha. Didn't you hear the shootin'?"

"Not after the first shot. We was too busy with that fool hoss o' Bert's to hear anythin'."

"Well, they's two o' them bummers all right. I counted six puffs o' smoke from two different places while I was ridin' along the top o' that cutbank huntin' for a low break, an' I'll bet I rode a mile before I found one."

"You might 'a' jumped it. Bert did."

"If I'd had his reason I might 'a'."

Bill Derr glanced at Bert and Tom where they rode side by side and permitted himself a very slight smile. But he made no comment. He knew when to let well enough alone.

"Ain't this draw leadin' toward that hill?"

Red squinted up at the sun to get his direction.

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"West of it, I guess," answered Bill Derr. "Maybe if we work round behind 'em we can give 'em a surprize."

"I'm willin'. I guess now that landlord must 'a' remembered where he met yuh."

"Huh? Whadda yuh mean? That landlord party wasn't in Flipup when I was here five years ago."

Red explained the allusion and Bill Derr swore.

"That's what comes o' bein' famous," said Red, his tongue in his cheek. "An' I won't go to —— to please any long-legged cow-wrastler, neither! You got yore nerve, to come pryin' round after our road-agents!"

"Yore road-agents!"

"Shore, ours. We was here first, wasn't we? Finders is keepers. That's us."

"You ain't found 'em yet, I guess."

"What makes yuh think they're here?" Red abruptly switched to a new angle of the subject.

"I don't think. I know."

Bill Derr winked at Red and turned into a dry wash that gave promise of leading to the rear of the bushwhackers' hill.

"Yuh know, huh?" gibed Red. "That's shore bright of yuh. Yo're packin' so much wisdom these days le's hear their names an' all."

"That's tellin'."

"Yeah, yuh bet it is, old-timer."

"What you two row-wowin' about?" Bert Kinzie in the rear wished to know.

"Bill thinks he knows more'n I do," replied Red Kane. "Yonder's a real nice thick wood," he added, looking ahead and to the right, "full o' real nice thick spruce, an' I only wish they was thicker."

"We'd oughta be able to injun up on them bushwhackers now," hazarded Tom, squinting at the feather-topped mass of foliage lifting above the right-hand bank of the wash.

"Here!" cried Red by way of comment and turned his horse at the bank.

OUTBLOWN nostrils showing velvet-red, the spatting quirts lacing their shrinking bellies, the wild-eyed ponies clawed their hump-backed way up the stiffish slope and scrambled over the top. They got into their stride in two jumps and pelted in and out among the spruce trees at a smart burst of speed.

Within five minutes their riders, dismounted, were reconnoitering the hill from the edge of the wood.

"——!" remarked Red, eying the bare-backed hill with huge disgust. "They've sloped."

"Maybe they've gone over other side of the hill," suggested Tom, not overlooking an opportunity to disagree with his brother. "Maybe yuh can't see where——"

"Aw, whatsa matter with yuh?" demanded Red. "Hill's smooth as a naked toad, 'ceptin' where them few bushes is on top, an' they ain't high enough to hide a hoss. They've done gone, I tell yuh."

"Yeah," corroborated Bill Derr, who was standing up, "they've slid out. Yonder they go." He pointed a lean brown finger northward. "What'd I tell yuh?" he added in quiet triumph. "I said they was two."

The two black specks slid up the flank of a swell four miles away and vanished behind the crest.

"They must 'a' been scared o' yuh, Bill," Red observed with a certain grimness.

"I guess," said Bill Derr, sadly notching on safety the hammer of his Winchester, "they must 'a' knowed you was along. That red topknot o' yores is worse'n a white horse—a dead giveaway wherever y'are. Why don'tcha wear a wig?"

"I would if I was gettin' bald like some long-legged folks I know. But alla same I don't think they seen me'n' Tom. No jokin', I don't. We was under that cut-bank two hours before you'n' Bert turned up, an' them fellers wasn't on that hill then, I'll gamble on that."

"Naw, they dunno nothin' about us," declared Tom.

"An' they ain't gonna neither," supplemented Red. "Which way you'n' Bert goin' back to Flipup?"

"The shortest way," said Bill Derr. "If it's that landlord——"

"You'll keep yore trap shut," Red interrupted quickly. "This ain't no time for rough-housin', Bill. Not by a jugful it ain't. Slide round cautious an' soft all same moccasin foot. That's all yo're gonna do. Tom an' me'll find out what's what."

"Look here!" exclaimed Tom, "if I was you fellers I wouldn't go back to Flipup. If yuh had any sense yuh wouldn't."

"We ain't got no sense," Bill Derr said shortly; "so that lets us out."

"An' also in," grinned Red. "Lordy, I knowed you. You'd have to go back to Flipup—you'd have to tickle the mule's

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hind wheels or you'd think yuh was missin' somethin'. 'S'no use givin' 'em an argument, Tom. Bert's just as bad. When was it yuh said yuh was here before, Bill?"

"Five year ago," said Bill Derr briefly.

"Was Brad Usher here then?"

"I didn't see no sign of him."

"Then he wasn't here—or you'd 'a' seen signs. He believes in signs, that feller. Was you yoreself at the time, Bill?"

"Not that trip," said Bill Derr, shaking his head. "I done let my beard grow out a spell."

"Then nobody'd know yuh now. Yore own maw wouldn't behind a faceful o' whiskers. I was just wonderin' about that landlord— Lookit, maybe Brad Usher—Say, didja ever hear o' him before? Not see—hear?"

"No, I didn't. Whadda you know about Brad Usher, anyway? Yo're always draggin' him in by the tail, I notice. Why? What's he gotta do with—why yo're here."

"I never said he had nothin' to do with why we're here," Bert denied hastily. "Le's be gettin' along to town. Yo're goin' that way, ain'tcha, Bill? Aw right, Tom, you'n' me——"

"Wait a shake," cut in the perplexed Bill Derr. "Tell me what yuh've found out, Red, will yuh? You needn't shake the old head at me thataway. I know yuh know somethin'."

"Who? Me? Me know anythin' besides my own name? Yo're crazy! Honest yuh are. Yuh'd oughta get that brain of yores looked at by a doc. It might be serious; yuh can't tell. I knowed a feller once, a lot like you, too, face, features an' all, an' he got to talkin' like yo're doin' now, an' pretty soon he was in a rheumatic asylum. You keep yore feet in the stirrups, Bill, an' let two gents who know how work this thing out. When we get the whole story, we'll tell yuh if yuh'll promise to be good an' wait patient. Lookit how nice'n' easy Bert is. Yuh don't catch him losin' no tempers."

"You idjit," Bill Derr laughed ruefully. "You poor benighted tomfool, I hope you choke."

MAY BILL DERR and Bert Kinzie were sitting on a packing-box in front of the California Store when Red and Tom rode down Main Street and turned off to go to the hotel corral. Bill Derr had his hat over his eyes. He seemed to be dozing. Knowing Bill, it would be safe to say that he wasn't. Bert Kinzie, engaged in wrapping a quirt-handle with rawhide, slid but a casual, unrecognizing glance at the two horsemen as they passed. Even the landlord, who was draped in careless ease over a window-sill of the hotel, could not have said that Bert had even a nodding acquaintance with the gentlemen named Carey.

From the hotel corral Red and Tom went directly to the office of Bradley Usher. Mr. Usher, occupied in leafing through a large ledger, looked up as the door flew open.

"Si'down," was his greeting. "Be with yuh in a minute."

But it was three before he spoke again, and then he said, with a sidelong look:

"Yo're late. Why?"

"We come when we're ready," was Red's snappy response, "an' not before."

"I see." Mr. Usher blinked at the brothers, closed the ledger and laid it on top of the safe. "Still," he continued, "I wish yuh'd come sooner. I had a li'l' job for yuh."

"Tough luck," commiserated Red.

"I had to give the job to some one else—an' they didn't succeed."

"Yeah?"

The hair at the back of Red's neck began to lift, his skin to prickle. He was like a terrier at a rat-hole.

"I don't give a —— for a man that don't succeed," was Mr. Usher's sententious declaration. "They ain't no excuse for not succeedin'. Is they?"

He shot out the question like a bullet.

"Not from where I'm sittin'," said Red.

Tom raised his hand to his face to hide the involuntary lifting of his mouth corners. This brother of his would jest in the path of a stampede.

"Maybe you'll succeed." Mr. Usher rubbed his long and shaven chin, his curious black gaze holding Red's eye.

"Maybe," Red, staring steadily back, permitted himself to say.

"Lessee you pull a gun," said Mr. Usher.

Red stood up and drew. Tom wondered at his lack of speed.

"Can'tcha do no better'n that?" Mr. Usher's tone was acid.

Red tried and bungled it. His front sight caught and held.

"——!" exclaimed Mr. Usher. "You've

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got plenty o' nerve, I'll say that for yuh, but yo're only average on the draw. I'd an idee you was faster'n that. Oh, yo're all right with a derringer. I know that. I seen yuh. But it ain't always close work, an' then a six-shooter is handiest. Lessee what yore brother can do."

But Tom had got the office and his performance was no whit better than Red's.

Mr. Usher spat his chew out of the window and took off his hat. When a fresh chew was revolving in the hinge of his jaw and the hat was again on his head, he looked up at the ceiling a moment.

"Well," he said, dropping his chin, "I dunno. I'd oughta tried you boys on that draw business last night. No offense, gents, but you wouldn't last the wiggle of a hoss's ear with six-shooters an' a fast gun-fighter."

"We've been lucky," said Red calmly. "What gun-fighter was you wantin' us to rub out?"

"I didn't say nothin' about no gun-fighter I wanted—rubbed out. I was just sayin' somethin'. They's two strangers come to town an' I want 'em either sent away or settled here permanent."

"Right nice country to take up a claim in," asserted Red.

"She's all o' that." Mr. Usher laughed mirthlessly. When he laughed he resembled more than ever a horse. "These strangers are the two that drifted in this mornin'. One of 'em, the tall, oldest one, is aimin' to ranch it next to one o' my ranches. I ain't aimin' to have 'em. Y' understand."

"Why down 'em both, if only one——"

"The other one's his friend. It'll make it easier to have both go. Look here, I ain't explainin' my business to nobody. I want them parties removed. I don't care how yuh do it. Neither of yuh'd stand a show with the tall buck—he's —— on the draw—but they can be bushwhacked, an' not a long distance bushwhack, neither. The closer the better. Even if y' ain't much with a rifle yuh can't miss at twenty or thirty yards."

"You don't want no misses this deal, huh?"

Red patted his knee and smoothed the leather of his chaps with the palm of his hand.

"Misses?" The eyebrows of the money-lender became a straight line. "Whadda yuh mean by 'misses'?"

"Well," said Red smoothly, "the landlord said somethin' to us about suspicionin' them two sports, so Tom an' me made out to trail 'em this mornin'. We wasn't a million mile away when a couple o' sharpshooters—an' they was real sharpshooters—cut down on 'em from that hill about six miles out on the trail to the Rafter O."

"I see," said Mr. Usher, and he added with great bitterness, "I thought them two —— could shoot. —— their souls! Now yo're in the saddle. Whirl yore rope."

"Guess we'd better have some rifle cartridges—couple o' fresh boxes .45-90's," said practical Tom.

Mr. Usher nodded, unjointed his long body in a prodigious stretch and led the way to the sleeping-apartment in the rear of the warehouse. He dropped on his knees beside the bed and dragged from beneath it a large open wooden box half filled with cartons of rifle cartridges. He scooped up half a dozen cartons in his two hands and tossed the lot upon the horsehide-covered desk.

"Help yoreselves," he invited and shoved back the box.

Red angled past the corner of the desk, snicked open a carton with his thumb nail and spilled the cartridges all abroad on the horsehide. While he stood between the desk and the packing-case wash-stand with its overshadowing shelf, stuffing the slim, lead-tipped brass cylinders into the loops of his cartridge-belt, he could not help but perceive clearly that which had previously escaped his roving eye—to wit, a stain, a golden-yellow stain that streakily splotched the red-chestnut horsehide from where it curled over the desk edge to the bottom of the skin.

The stain, which curiously resembled the silhouette of a great hand with thumb and four long fingers outspread, caught and held Red's attention a moment only. But memory requires no more than a moment—the merest eye-flash will serve—to file away sufficient evidence to stretch many a wicked neck.

TO BE CONCLUDED

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THE SLOTH

by Arthur C Friel

Author of "The Snake."

THERE was a man, *senhores*, whom we called the "Sloth." And he could kill with the revolver faster than any man I ever saw or shall ever hope to see.

You look surprized, and I do not wonder. Perhaps in your wanderings up the Javary and in the Peruvian jungle you have seen the sloth—that queer brute which lives in the trees, hangs upside down and never moves but to eat. He looks like a dead thing and he is dead—all except his belly. He is the lowest and the slowest animal that lives in all the Amazon forest.

How, then, could a man resemble him and still be fast with a weapon? Yet, *senhores*, what I tell you is true. And now, while the steamer bears us on toward the far-off Atlantic, I will tell you of how this man became a sloth and of what happened after. It will interest you, for he was an American like yourselves.

He was not a sloth when he came among us. No; he was alive and alert, with a twinkle in his eye and a ready smile that won men's hearts, and an iron grip of the hand that spoke strength and steadiness; a fine, upstanding man, who would rather be your friend than your enemy—but who, you felt, could be a dangerous enemy if he were so minded. He came with letters to the *coronel*, who owns the vast rubber country where I worked, and the *coronel*, lonely gentleman, welcomed him with the true Brazilian hospitality.

For weeks the American stayed among us, going with us into the jungle and observing our work and our ways. He carried no rifle with him, as we always do, only a heavy revolver slung across his hips and low on the right thigh. But with that revolver he never missed. There were times when we met bad snakes, such as the *jararáca*, and then the American's hand moved so fast the eye could scarcely see it, and *flash*—the snake was squirming, headless, before we realized that he had drawn his gun. If all of you Americans can shoot like him, *senhores*, it is no wonder that your army won the great war in Europe.

Then one day he left us. He went so quietly that most of us did not know of his going until he was gone, and where he had gone nobody seemed to know except the *coronel*, who appeared troubled in mind. But in time we learned and the learning was a shock to us. *Senhores*, he had gone into the country of the cannibals.

We shook our heads and grieved and called him mad. For these Indians of the cannibal tribes, as you know, are fierce and cruel and haters of white men, and when we knew that our American friend had gone among them we mourned him as dead. At first we blamed the *coronel* for allowing him to go. But then we remembered the feeling of iron in his grip and his swiftness with the revolver, and we knew that not a score of *coronels* could have stayed him when he once determined on what he would do. We

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knew, too, that more than one Indian would die before he fell.

Weeks passed and we heard strange things. The rumor came that our Senhor Eduardo was still alive, that he had found rubber and men to work it and—this we could scarce believe—that he had made the savage, man-eating Indians his friends. And later we found that this was true. For one thing, he was yellow-haired and blue-eyed, and the wild men had never seen such a man; and partly by this, and partly by his straight manliness, and perhaps by some tricks which they would take for magic, he formed a rough friendship with them. Of course, this friendship was thin as a spider-web and likely to break at a breath. Indeed, later it did break—as you shall hear. But for the time he was safe.

Though we hoped that this was true we could not really believe it until he came back to us and we saw him with our own eyes. For he did come in at length for mail which the *coronel* kept for him. The *coronel* embraced him like a brother and we men who were there shouted welcome to him. And he shook hands with us as heartily as with the *coronel* and slapped us on the shoulder, though the *coronel* is very wealthy and we are but workmen. He told us briefly about himself but warned us not to come into that country, as the wild men would kill us. We did not need the warning.

Before long, however, he began to ship out rubber, and in this way I got into the cannibal country. He had an arrangement with the *coronel* to handle his rubber for him, and as I am a good boatman the *coronel* ordered me to go with him and help in moving it. I hesitated. But Senhor Eduardo laughed and said—

"With me, Lourenço, you are safe."

And so I was. I went with him, and the fact that I was with him kept me unharmed, even as he said. And at first, you may be sure, I did not go in there without him.

Then came a day when he came suddenly to headquarters with his face shining like the sun. And even as he jumped from his canoe he shouted to the *coronel*, so that all of us heard:

"Gold! Gold, my friend! A whole creek full of it! *Coronel*, I am a millionaire! Gold, yellow gold washed from the Andes!"

And he leaped in the air and pulled his gun and danced a war-dance, shooting into the trees. When his gun was empty he reached into the canoe and brought out a bag made from a hide and showed us the gold—raw, yellow gold, just as he said. Then he and the *coronel* went inside and the *coronel* gave him more mail.

JOAO MARQUES and I, who were there to get supplies, were loading our canoe when he came out again. He was not the same man. He walked without spring and his eyes were set and his face gray. Crushed in one fist was a letter. He came straight past us without seeing us and got into his canoe and went away. He paddled in jerks, stopping now and then with paddle in air or water, as if he did not know what he was doing. We stared after him until he was gone. Then Joao said—

"Lourenço, there goes a man stabbed through the heart."

From that day on we saw nothing of our Senhor Eduardo. No rubber came from his country. No word came out. The days lengthened into weeks. At last the *coronel* could endure it no longer. He sent for me and asked me if I, the only man who knew how to reach the American, would go in alone and seek him. And in the morning I went.

I reached him, *senhores*, because the wild men knew me as his friend and let me pass. But when I reached him I hardly knew him. He had become the Sloth. He lay in his hammock, a red-faced, red-eyed, bloated mass of flesh which had been a man and was no longer a man. His hair was matted, his face grown over with beard. And the hair had no life, no sheen; it was such dry, dingy hair as the sloth has. His *tambo* smelt of liquor and he smelt of liquor. He was nothing but a living belly, rotting himself to death in the jungle. And in the jungle a man rots fast.

When I stood before him he did not rise nor even speak; he only rolled his red eyes at me. I told him why I had come and gave him more mail and a note from the *coronel*. He dropped the mail in the dirt and read only the *coronel's* note. Then he dropped that and lay a while blinking at the roof and finally grunted—

"Uh-hum."

Only he did not say it that way, but slowly; first, "Uh," and after a time,

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"Hum." He was truly a sloth; for the sloth, as you know, groans when it has to do anything at all. At last he grumbled—

"Tell the *coronel* what you have seen."

Then he closed his eyes and soon began to snore.

For two days I stayed there, seeing what I could see, to report to the *coronel*. And I was amazed. For, though the Sloth lay stupid and sluggish, work went steadily on. Wealth was growing around him while he rotted. Rubber came in and was piled up. Gold came in and was dumped in a huge heap, like dirt. And what astonished me most was that the work was done by the naked wild men, who hate the whites and hate toil.

At first this labor had been done by Peruvian half-breeds, but none was there now. I do not believe the cannibals had killed them, though it may be so. More likely they had gotten what you call the "cold feet" and quit. Now all was done by the savages. They brought in the rubber and gold and they guarded it day and night, and two women of their tribe, who were almost handsome, fed the Sloth and kept the flies off him and gave him drink.

No, they were nothing to him, those women; they might as well have been dogs for all he cared. Yet they tended him more carefully than a babe, and the men worked on as I have said. This I could not understand, until on the second day there came from the jungle several savages and I saw that one of them was a chief.

This chief looked sharply at everything and then talked with the Sloth. He gave me black looks, too, until the Sloth grunted something in the Indian language which satisfied him. Then I understood. All this was being done for the Sloth because the chief ordered it, and his word was law.

I saw, too, that the chief had things which to him were great treasures—a white man's hunting-knife and a little ax and other things which the Sloth must have given him. And, as I thought, I could see still more—that at a word from the chief the men would kill the American as readily as they worked for him, and that the time might come when the Sloth would refuse him something he desired, and then he would speak that word.

This put a new thought in my head. In the end the Sloth would die—from the wild men, or fever, or beriberi, or rot. Then all this wealth would be useless, lost forever. He might have relatives in his own country to whom this rubber and gold would be a godsend. So, since he was too slothful to do anything for himself or his own, I might do it for him while there was yet time. When the chief had gone, I put this idea before him as politely as I could. He blinked a while and then said:

"Take it. I have nobody. But the *coronel* is a good friend. Take it to him. Tell him he can have it all. Uh. Hum."

Then he would have snored again, but I gave him no chance until he gave orders that this should be done. He sent a woman to find a head man and told him what to do. The next morning the wild men loaded my canoe and three others with gold; the head man came into my boat and we all paddled away to headquarters. I left the rubber until later.

IT WAS a queer procession, *senhores*. Not a word was said, for I could not talk their language, and the head man and I only made signs to each other. All the wild men were ready for fight and when we neared the headquarters I had to go ahead and warn all our men to keep away from the river-bank. There the savages dumped all the gold where I showed them and, then they paddled away, with bows and blow-guns ready for any attack. But none of our people wanted to attack them; we were only too glad to have them go.

When the *coronel* saw me back alive he almost embraced me. But when I told my tale he sorrowed. And when he saw the heap of gold his black eyes snapped angrily and he kicked it and growled:

"Yellow dirt! Price of a good man's soul!"

But I said:

"No, *coronel*. It was something else that destroyed our Senhor Eduardo."

And he nodded and answered:

"I know. A letter. And you did well, Lourenço, to bring out the gold. Can we not bring him out, too?"

But I told him no, that could not be done. So he said:

"Then will I keep this gold until we know he is dead, and find his heirs, if he has such, and give it to them. I will not have an ounce of it. When you go again you shall take him a receipt."

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Then he had it stowed away in his own house, where it would be safe.

My mates, when they heard my story, shook their heads and grieved. And from that day on they spoke of Senhor Eduardo as dead. In truth they were right, for he and the Sloth were not the same man. When they spoke of the white man who now lived among the cannibals, they called him always the Sloth—a thing which lived and did not live. In time even the *coronel* did the same.

After a while I went back to the Sloth and brought out more gold. I hated to go, for it hurt me to look at him. As might be expected, he was growing more stupid and disgusting than ever. Yet I went in and out, for the sake of the *coronel* and the memory of the Senhor Eduardo who had been. Each time the *coronel* sent a receipt and each time the Sloth crumpled it up and dropped it in the dirt. At last the gold gave out. When I came for more the Sloth grunted:

"No more. Creek worked out. Uh. Hum."

So then I began on the rubber.

When I reached headquarters with the first rubber cargo I met a surprize. The savages were with me—six canoes—and I went ahead as usual to tell our people to leave the river-bank. And there at the landing, *senhores*, was a white woman. Yes, an American woman, young and very beautiful. When I shouted she did not understand and go. Instead, she stood there gazing with wide eyes at me and the savage head man in my canoe, like a child looking at something new and wonderful. Soon the *coronel* himself came hastening down to take her away. But the wild men behind me had not waited—they never waited but came on ready for war.

So they reached me just as the *coronel* reached her, and they stopped their paddles and stared at her, grunting among themselves in astonishment. Then came a man from the house after the *coronel*—another American. The *coronel* spoke fast, and the man nodded and talked to the woman, and she turned slowly and went with them. But she looked back at us and asked eager questions all the way to the house.

And we, out on the water, stared after her until she was gone. Even after the wild men had thrown out the rubber and started away, they kept looking back and grunting to one another until they disappeared around a bend.

They had hardly gone before the American was down at the river again, looking at the rubber. The others came too, of course—the woman and the *coronel* and all the others at headquarters; but the American saw nothing but the rubber, while I saw nothing but the woman. She was the most beautiful woman I ever looked upon, and she stood like a splendid, gracious young queen.

Yet the man with her, as I say, could not see her for the rubber. He asked me questions in very bad Portuguese about the wild men, and whether there was much rubber in their country, and so on. I might have told him all about it but for two things. First, I disliked him; he was too sleek, and he looked cold and selfish, and his eyes never seemed to meet mine, but to look at my mouth or my hat or my ears. Second, I caught the *coronel's* eye and he shook his head very slightly. So I told him the rubber was the *coronel's* and turned my back on him and walked away.

My mates told me that the pair had come four days before—just after I left to go to the Sloth—on one of the small river boats. The man was after rubber, and he had gone out into the bush with some of the men—not very far, for he was scared by any strange noise. The roar of a howling monkey, they said, left him pale as the belly of a fish, though they had told him what it was.

He was blustering and overbearing, and the men despised him as a coward and cursed him for bringing his wife into such a country. For this is no place for any white woman, especially such as she. The men said, too, that she was a better man than he was; that she was fearless and did not complain about the heat and insects and dampness as he did, and that she looked you right in the eye, frank and unafraid. I had noticed the last myself.

The men said also that the word had gone out from the *coronel* that if either of these two asked about our Senhor Eduardo they were to say he was dead—that he had been here but had died in the jungle. Since our *coronel* always has a good reason for his orders, the men judged that these Americans were friends of our friend and that the good old *coronel* would not grieve them nor dishonor the memory of Senhor Eduardo by telling them the shameful truth.

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So they answered the new American's question as they had been told. For he asked. Yes, he asked as soon as the men took him into the jungle. He even asked two of them, at different times, to see if they would both say the same. They told me that when they answered "Dead" he drew a long face, but that his eyes gleamed as if he were pleased.

My girl Lucia, too, who worked in the *coronel's* house, told me that the American woman had asked. While her husband was away she asked the *coronel*—picking out the words from a little Portuguese book she had—whether Senhor Eduardo was in this country now. The *coronel* looked long at her and she blushed.

Then he told her very gently that Eduardo was dead, that a letter had come, and he had read it and gone out into the jungle alone and died there. She sat silent, then arose and went to her room and my Lucia heard her weeping. The *coronel* heard it, too, for the walls were very thin, and he sat looking at his desk and slowly nodded.

NOW this new Senhor Crooke talked much about the rubber I had brought from the cannibal country and the *coronel* told him it was not his but that of a man called the Sloth, who sent it out to him to ship along with his own. Then he wanted to buy it. So the *coronel*, after turning things over in his mind, sent for me and asked me if I could take this man in with me on my next trip, to deal with the Sloth. I said I could if necessary, though I was not eager to do it. When Crooke was told I would take him I could see he was not eager to make that dangerous trip either. He demanded that the Sloth be brought out to him. But that, we told him, was something that could not be done—if he would see the Sloth, he must go to him. He walked up and down, grumbling and trying not to show that he was afraid. Finally he blurted out that he was there to get rubber, not to be killed by savages. To that I replied that I had gone among the savages many times and had not been killed yet. He turned red and growled that he would go. And he did.

All through that trip I could see he was struggling between fear and greed. Several times there came to us the screams of animals suddenly attacked by other animals in the bush, and at these times he nearly upset the canoe and his face looked like that of a dead man. Then he would try to cover up his scare by blustering and swearing. Finally I tired of it and said:

"*Senhor*, those are only animals. If you will keep quiet, nothing will happen to you."

After that he said no more, and as we went on and he found that no harm came to him he got back some courage. When at last we reached the path to Senhor Eduardo's hut he went ashore with a swagger—though he stuck very close to me when we passed any Indians.

As the savages had first let me pass because I was with Senhor Eduardo, so now they let Senhor Crooke pass because he was with me. But they looked hard at him and growled among themselves. Though I did not know their tongue I knew what they were saying—that more white men were coming into their country. It angered them. When I saw one of them slip away into the jungle I suspected he had gone to tell his chief and I smelt trouble.

The Sloth lay in his hammock as always. A dead cigaret hung from his lower lip and the baggy pouches under his bleared eyes were bigger than ever. I watched the man Crooke to see if he would show the disgust he must feel at sight of such a man. But he was looking at the women. As I have said, they were almost handsome, and as I saw the leer on his face I nearly kicked him.

But then he turned to the Sloth and went straight to business. He wished to look over the rubber, he said, and perhaps to buy it. The Sloth blinked at him and then, to my astonishment, moved. Slowly he sat up. For the first time since he had become a sloth, *senhores*, a light flickered in those red eyes of his. It grew, that light, until it was a cold flame.

Crooke, avoiding his eye as he had avoided mine, looked at his swollen, puffy face below the eyes. And I saw that into his own face came a puzzled look, as if he were trying to remember whether he had seen this man before.

Then the Sloth grunted and nodded and Crooke turned to go and inspect the rubber. I turned, too, but the Sloth said—

"Lourenço!"

So I called a savage standing near and the Sloth grumbled something to him, and he went with Crooke. When they were outside the Sloth said hoarsely—

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"Lourenço, whence comes this man?"

I told him all I knew, keeping nothing back. He sat awhile, hands on knees, staring out. Then he moved again. Slowly he rolled another cigaret, and one of the women lit a match for him, and he breathed smoke deep into his lungs. Before he finished it Crooke came back.

He would buy the rubber, he said. He named a price about half what it was worth. The Sloth said—

"No rubber."

Senhor Crooke scowled and offered more money. The Sloth sat unmoved. Crooke raised his offer again and yet again, more reluctantly each time, until he reached top price. It was very good money, that last price. But the Sloth said—

"I have no rubber."

"No rubber!" cried Crooke, turning to look at the heaps of it outside the *tambo*. "No rubber?"

"No rubber—for you," said the Sloth. "Go!"

Then Crooke turned red with anger and began to curse. The Sloth moved again. From a pole above his hammock hung his big revolver and cartridge belt, and with a sort of sluggish speed he reached for it. But before his fat hand touched it I grabbed Crooke and fairly threw him out of the *tambo*.

"Fool!" I said. "You face death!" And to the Sloth I cried, "*Senhor*, a woman waits for this man."

His hand dropped and I heard him swallow hard.

"You are right," he said after a pause. "Go. And do not come again until I send for you."

So we went to the canoe and got away. The wild men growled again as we passed, but none molested us.

After we reached headquarters, the man Crooke complained about me to the *coronel*, saying I had assaulted him at the *tambo*. But the *coronel* before making a decision waited until he had heard my tale, too, when this man was elsewhere, and approved all I had done. And when Crooke, disappointed by his failure to get the Sloth's rubber, would have bought some from the *coronel*, the old gentleman said he was sorry but all his rubber was contracted for. So Crooke got none. But he stayed on. He had come for rubber and rubber he would have.

SINCE no word came from the Sloth I went back to my regular work in the bush. I was there for weeks before I was sent for. Then came one with orders to report at headquarters. He said, too, that two wild men had come in a canoe and, without landing, had shot an arrow toward the *coronel's* house and gone away again, and tied around the arrow was a note for the *coronel*. So I knew the Sloth had sent for me. And so it was.

This time I went alone. The man Crooke wanted to go again, but I would not take him. He looked ugly, and I noticed that his wife seemed pale and thinner than when she came. It made me hot at heart, for I knew she was withering, like the Northern flower she was, in the choking river climate. My Lucia told me, too, that her husband was unkind and spoke harshly to her. He was becoming like a surly dog, growling at the one he should love.

But when I saw the Sloth again I forgot the Crookes. He was not a sloth now. He was clean. His eyes were clear. The bloat was gone from his body and though he was heavier than when I first knew him his flesh was firm. His yellow hair and beard still were thick, but they were no longer matted and uncombed and the dead sloth dryness had gone from them. He was active again and wore his belt and gun, and the women who had tended him were gone. I saw too that his *tambo* was clean and I could smell no liquor. I stood amazed, hardly believing it. But it was so. The Sloth had died, but not as we expected him to die, for in his place our Senhor Eduardo had come back.

Yet he was not quite our old Senhor Eduardo, for that one had had the quick smile and the friendly eye, while this man's face was grim and hard. Still, when I laughed in joy and said, "Senhor Eduardo, you are back from the dead!" he smiled a bit and said:

"Yes, Lourenço, my friend. And I am glad there is one who rejoices."

And he slapped my shoulder in the old way. Indeed, he nearly knocked me down, and I knew the iron strength was alive in him yet.

As before, I told him all there was to tell. When I told how the beautiful young queen was drooping and how Crooke stayed on and grew harsh toward her, his expression turned black as a thundercloud. Yet he said no

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word. While the loading of the rubber went on he stood brooding and now and again his fists closed hard. When the cargo was ready, I said:

"Come out with us, Senhor Eduardo. As I have told you, the *coronel* holds all your gold and will have none of it. You are tremendously rich, *senhor*. Leave the rest and come out of this death-country and live again."

But he answered:

"Not yet, Lourenço. Go yourself, and come back. And bring with you that man, Crooke."

As you may suppose, the old *coronel* was greatly pleased by my news. The man Crooke, too, brightened when I told him the Sloth would see him again. Yes, I took care to say "the Sloth" and told him nothing further. He grinned like a snarling jaguar and sneered—

"So the drunken bum is ready to do business!"

But he got ready with all speed.

In the few days of my going and coming the Sloth changed still more into Senhor Eduardo. For he cut his hair and beard and shaved. Yet the shaving, though it cleaned his face, made it all the harder, for it revealed the new grim lines which had come there. When he looked into the eyes of Crooke his face was like stone and his own eyes hard as blue steel. And Crooke gave a startled gasp and fell back, staring and open-mouthed and pale. He tried three times before he could speak.

"Ed!" he jerked out. "Ed! They said you had died!"

"I had," said Senhor Eduardo. "But I'm alive again and dangerous as dynamite to some folks. Keep that in mind."

The man Crooke kept on staring. Then he became crafty and pretended he was glad.

"Well, good old Ed!" he cried. "Alive and strong! Man, but you're a welcome sight! Shake!"

And he made as if to seize Senhor Eduardo's hand. But that hand met his chest and shoved him back roughly.

"Hands off!" said Senhor Eduardo. "And my name is Armstrong—Mister Armstrong. Only my friends can call me Ed."

The other looked ugly a moment, but then he smoothed out his face.

"I'm sorry you feel that way, Ed—Mr. Armstrong," he said. "Best let bygones be bygones. But about the rubber—how much will you sell?"

"You'll get no rubber. Not an ounce. I sent for you to tell you to get out of this country and stay out! You'll get nothing here but fever and death. Not that I care for what happens to you, but Betty is slowly dying here—as you might see if you could think of anything but your own selfish carcass. Why she ever married a thing like you God only knows. But now that she's yours, you'll take care of her! Take her back to God's country, where she belongs. And another thing. You've been snapping and snarling at her, like the yellow dog you are. Cut it out! Remember I'm alive and wherever you go I'm going to keep track of you. If you make her unhappy any more I'm going to close your account *pronto*. Get me?"

His hand dropped to his gun.

My glance followed his movement and I saw something I had not yet noticed. Senhor Eduardo now carried two revolvers, with two belts of cartridges crossing each other. And the scabbards of the guns were tied down by thongs around his legs. I had never seen him with more than one, nor was that one fastened down. But before I had time to wonder Crooke answered in rage.

"All right—Sloth! I'll go, and I'll take a fine little story with me; a tale of a bloated, dirty bum in a hammock, rotten with booze, and of a couple of dusky beauties fanning the flies off him and ——"

"Senhor Eduardo!" I shouted. "Remember, some one waits!"

And I was just in time. But for that shout Crooke would have died in his tracks. As before, the thought of the woman waiting halted the hand that would have killed him, though this time the hand had moved like lightning and the gun was out. Senhor Eduardo swayed on his feet from the violence of his fight with himself, and then he shoved the weapon back. And to the man before him, who had turned fish-belly color, he spat—

"Shut up!"

Then he turned his back on him and ordered the canoes loaded up as before. During the loading he said no word except once when he saw me looking at his two guns.

"The chief is growing dangerous, Lourenço," he said then. "I've given him

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everything in reason and some things not in reason, but he keeps demanding more and more."

So now I knew why he went so heavily armed, expecting the spider-web friendship to break at any minute. And again I urged him to come out, but once more he said—

"Not yet."

And I thought, he waits until the girl has gone from headquarters so he will not have to meet her. Well, she will go now, for her husband has said so. Little did I know what lay ahead!

On our homeward trip Crooke sat for a time staring back sourly at the rubber following us. Then suddenly I heard him laugh. A thought had struck him that pleased him mightily. I saw he was working out some plan in his mind, and his eyes were reckless and bad.

NOW you understand, *senhores*, that on my trips into the wild men's country I traveled always by myself. On the voyages with rubber down to headquarters I was Senhor Eduardo's lieutenant in charge of the fleet of canoes, but I never returned with them; I stayed with my own people until it was time to go again. So when I started back the next morning, after bringing out Crooke for the second time, I was alone.

I had told the *coronel* we must speed the shipment of Senhor Eduardo's rubber and he had agreed. He was worried again, and when I told him of my thought that Senhor Eduardo might come out if the girl went he paced the floor and thought hard and said he would try to send her and her husband away on the next river boat, due in a few days and meanwhile I must go and come as fast as I could and take with me plenty of cartridges.

That night, as I learned, he talked long with Crooke. And I cleaned and oiled my rifle and in the morning when I left I took with me more bullets than I ever carried before. It was well that I did, for not many of them came back with me.

I had gotten well away from the landing that morning and was settling into my long-distance stroke when some one called. I paused and saw Crooke in the bush. I shook my head and resumed paddling, but he called again and then I saw his wife with him. They had hastened down an *estrada* by the bank and now he said something about a message for Senhor Eduardo.

So I went to the bank to get this message. Then he said:

"You are to give Senhor Armstrong our farewell. And you are to take us down the river to meet a boat coming for us, which you will see before you turn into the country of the wild men. We are going out."

Now, had I stopped to think, I would have seen that he lied, for they would not go like this, secretly and without their baggage. And the *coronel* had said there would be no boat for days. But I was in haste, and my first thought was that now Senhor Eduardo would come out when I told him they were gone, and I was glad. So I quickly took them in and hastened on down the river. But soon I began to do the thinking I should have done before, and, as no boat appeared, I grew more and more uneasy.

At length I stopped and looked sharply at both of them. The girl's eyes shone and there was color in her cheeks, as if she had heard wonderful news. Her husband, though, watched me like a snake, and I read the lie in his face. Without a word I turned the canoe to take them back.

Out shot Crooke's fist with a flat pistol in it.

"Put up your hands!" he snapped.

I studied him and saw that he would shoot. So I put them up. Keeping me covered, he reached with his foot and dragged my rifle away from me along the bottom of the canoe.

"Now," he said, "you will take us to Armstrong!"

I refused. To take the woman in among those savages was unthinkable. I saw, too, that she was surprized and disturbed, almost frightened, by his sudden action in threatening me. Yet she wanted to see Senhor Eduardo, that was clear. What tale her husband had told her I could not know, but I felt it was not a true one. When I still refused, in spite of the pistol, she said, in the Portuguese she had learned in the past weeks:

"Yes, Lourenço, take us to Edward—to Senhor Armstrong. We must reach him before it is too late."

And Crooke added:

"If you do not, you go overboard with a bullet in you and we go on. I can find the way without you."

I knew he meant it. I knew also that

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ey could never pass the wild men without e and that the lady Betty's only hope of afety lay in me. So at last, hot with anger, started on.

If I could have got my rifle, *senhores*, would have shot him and paddled like ad back to headquarters with his wife. ut in all that trip he never put away his istol or took his feet off my gun. And so nally we came to Senhor Eduardo's *mbo*.

He was not there. The work, though, as going on as usual. It stopped when we ame, however, and all the wild men there rowded around, staring at the girl and runting excitedly to one another. Crooke ad given back my rifle when we landed, nowing it was too late for me to use it gainst him, and I held it ready while I ointed to the hammock and made signs elling the Indians to bring the *senhor*. They grunted again and then two of them oroke away and ran into the jungle. But they ran in different directions, and again I thought of the chief.

Soon Senhor Eduardo came hastening with one of the runners. We had put the lady Betty inside the *tambo*, where she sat down in the hammock while we stood outside and held the wild men from coming too near. When Senhor Eduardo saw Crooke his face darkened, but before he spoke to us he barked at the Indians and they slowly turned back to their work, scowling and muttering. Then he snapped—

"Lourenço, why do you bring this man here again?"

"Because he has a pistol, *senhor*, and got my rifle from me," said I.

And I would have said more, but just then the girl jumped up from the hammock behind us and ran out.

"Oh, Edward, you are well again!" she cried. "Robert told me he had found you and you weren't dead as they said but very ill with fever and you—you wanted to see me. I'm so glad you've recovered!"

Senhores, I shall never forget his face. He stood as if something had struck him and dazed him and made him wonder whether he saw rightly. And then he turned dead white and his face looked drawn, as if he suffered pain. And after a time he said in a jerky way:

"Yes, Betty—Mrs. Crooke—I am—I am better—thank you. But what—how——"

Then he looked at Crooke again, and his pallor turned to angry red, and his blue eyes blazed.

"So you lied to her!" he roared. "You lied and brought her into this death-trap!" And his hands, hanging low beside his guns, opened and shut. "Get her out of here, you skunk! Get out quick while there is time!"

"There'll be time enough when I've told you something," said Crooke recklessly. "You said a while ago that Betty was slowly dying in this country. Well, she is. Look at her! And do you know why she's dying? Because I can't get rubber here, and without rubber I can't get out or take her out! I'm broke! Do you think I came into this hell-hole for the fun of it? Not much! I played my last card in coming down here from the States, and if I can contract for rubber I'll be on my feet again—and Betty can live. And you, with so much rubber you can't handle it—you won't sell me an ounce. And that old fool Coronel Nunes won't sell me because you won't. You're the man that's killing Betty, not I! Now if you want her to live, you can take my note and give me that rubber."

Then I saw it all. He was using that little wife as a tool to force Senhor Eduardo into selling to him. And she saw it, too. She looked at her husband as if just awakening to a realization of what he was. But before she could speak Senhor Eduardo snapped—

"If you're broke, what good is your note?"

"The minute I get a bona fide contract it's good as gold," declared Crooke. "There are men in the States who will take every ounce of rubber I can get, and they'll take it cash down, with a handsome profit to me. When I get mine, you get yours. Naturally, I'm telling you this only because I have to. I was gambling on doing business with some Brazilian boob on the strength of a note and a good front, and cleaning up a bigger profit than I'll get on your stuff. But you'll get your money; don't worry about that. I'm too good a business man to try to double-cross you—because I know you're itching for a chance to do me up!"

And he laughed, *senhores*, a nasty laugh that showed he was sure Eduardo now would give him the rubber for his wife's sake. But then the lady Betty spoke, with her head high and her eyes stormy.

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"Edward, that is unnecessary. I am not dying, and I have my own money——"

"No, you haven't!" snarled her husband. "Your money is gone too. I made some unlucky investments with it. So don't be so high and mighty. I'm telling the plain truth. You're broke, and I'm broke, and unless Ed sells me his——"

"He will sell you nothing!" she interrupted. "Edward, I forbid you to do anything of the sort. Robert, you will take me out of here at once, and I shall tell Coronel Nunes the truth—the truth which I have just learned! He is a good old gentleman, and he will trust us until we can repay him."

Senhor Eduardo's look at the man Crooke was deadly. But he had himself in hand now, and he said in a repressed tone:

"That will be unnecessary, Betty. Crooke can have all the rubber he needs if he will promise to take you out immediately. But you must leave here at once. Lourenço, you will tell the *coronel* to sell my rubber to this man on a long-term note—as long as he likes. Tell him also to give to this lady a large gift from that which you took out to him before the rubber. Not a word, Betty! Now come quickly. I will go with you myself as far as the big river so that no harm shall come to you."

BUT already it was too late. The chief had come. He must have been close at hand to arrive so quickly—or perhaps runners from the river had gone to him long before we reached Senhor Eduardo. Now he stood not ten feet from us, looking at the girl from head to foot. And his look, *senhores*, made me feel cold inside.

For a moment none of us moved. Then Senhor Eduardo spoke to him and at the same time motioned us toward the canoes. But the chief answered back and jerked his head toward her, and he and Senhor Eduardo began to dispute. The other wild men left off their work and drew together behind the chief, scowling at us men and looking at her. And I knew the chief told Senhor Eduardo he desired her and would take her as one of his wives. And his tone and face were very ugly.

Senhor Eduardo said no and pointed to his *tambo*, and I saw he was offering the chief everything he had there. But it was useless. The chief grew uglier and his men fingered their weapons. Then Crooke brought it all to a sudden end. Taking his wife's arm as if he wanted her to protect him, he started sidling away toward the canoe. The chief slipped in front of him and blocked him. And whether Crooke was so confused with fear that he forgot he had a pistol, or so much afraid of the Indians that he dared not draw it, I do not know; but he did the worst thing he could do—he shoved the chief aside and tried to run.

Maddened by the shove, the chief struck like a snake. With his little ax he split Crooke's head to the eyes.

The girl cried out. The chief reached and seized her. Then a gun crashed beside me. The chief spun around and fell, shot through the head.

"Run!" bellowed Senhor Eduardo.

The command struck us like a blast of wind, turning us about and starting us toward the canoe without our thinking. Down the path through the bush we fled. As we ran I heard behind me the repeated roar of Senhor Eduardo's two guns.

At the water she stopped and turned and made as if she would go back. I forced her into the canoe and leaped in myself and struck off. But she looked at me, her big eyes black in her white face, and said:

"We must not leave him to die, Lourenço! Use your rifle!"

If I had not been so anxious for her safety, I would have done that before. Now I looked across the stream and picked a place where we could lie hidden under the bush while we watched the path. A few strokes brought us there. Then, while she clung to vines and held the boat quiet, I took up my gun. But a sick feeling came over me when I realized that the shooting had stopped.

Soon, though, it came again—blunt, smashing reports from the jungle. Later I learned that the wild men had been stricken motionless a moment by the swift death of their chief and then had stumbled over one another in their confused attack on Senhor Eduardo. That gave him the few seconds he needed to shoot his way through them and take cover in the bush and reload. And now we could see him working toward us and catch glimpses of the wild men swarming into the jungle around him.

And oh, *senhores*, what a fight! He was like a flickering shadow, that man who had been the Sloth; he was there and then not

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re but somewhere else, and the poisoned rts and arrows could not hit him. And every move he belched flame from those ns and we heard the rustle and bump of dies falling among the bushes. Then a use, and silence. Then the crash of his ns again, newly loaded. And every ish was followed by a thump, for at every ot he killed.

At first I could not help him, for I could t see a man long enough to shoot. But ter a time four savages broke through the ngle and worked along the bank toward e path, having gotten around him and tending now to kill him from behind. ut they never reached the path—I saw to at. When he heard my rifle, he rose up om where he was and looked toward us id shouted—

"Go, you fool!"

Then he dropped, just as an arrow ashed where he had been, and *crash!* a gun ared, and another rustle showed one ore wild man down.

But I stayed where I was. There came a ilence. I called and he answered. I ould not see nor hear any more men round him. And then I saw him going way from us again—going back! It was adness and I groaned. But still I waited, ifle ready. He shot twice into the bush efore we lost sight of him. More blunt eports sounded from his *tambo*. Then he ame again, running now, and across his houlders like a bag of flour he brought the ody of Crooke.

Yes, *senhores*, it was so. For the sake of the woman—and perhaps also because Crooke was, after all, a white man—he would not leave him there for the cannibals to mutilate and devour. Even while he ran down the path there sounded behind him a ferocious yell as more wild men came through the jungle to attack. Dropping the body into a canoe that lay there, he leaped in and paddled away. He did not even have time to make the other canoes useless.

We darted out from our hiding-place and joined him. He scowled at me and snapped:

"Why did you not go, Lourenço? You will have to fight now! Betty, lie down in the canoe!"

And she obeyed without a word while he and I paddled like mad.

He spoke truly, for I did have to fight. The Indians swarmed into the canoes and raced after us, yelling in a way to chill our blood. I thought, this is the end, for I can not paddle and shoot too. Senhor Eduardo saw this and he said:

"Give me your rifle and cartridges and I will stay and stand them off. My own ammunition is almost gone."

But then the lady Betty sat up and said:

"No, Lourenço. Give me the paddle and use your rifle yourself."

Then he said:

"Good girl! Give her the paddle, Lourenço. She can handle it, and you are a better rifleman than I am."

And I found that she could paddle indeed. Her stroke was not so powerful as mine, of course, but it was beautifully smooth and did not jerk the canoe and spoil my aim. So, while we fled down the winding stream, I fired until the gun-barrel burned my hands. It was easy shooting, for the stream was narrow and the savage canoes crowded one another, and when my bullets tore into the wild men they fell and dragged in the water and tangled up their boats still more.

Now and then I caught the roar of Senhor Eduardo's guns too as he dropped his paddle and shot into the bush along the banks, where he had seen something. It was a mad race for a while, *senhores*, and several of the poisoned arrows ripped into our own canoes, but none scratched us. So at length, though the cannibals threw their dead overboard and followed on and on, I shot them and their canoes so full of holes that we won free.

When we knew we were clear of them my paddler gave a little sigh and fell forward. As I have told you, she was far from strong now after weeks in the river country, and in that paddling she had given the last ounce of her strength. Indeed, she had gone far beyond her strength, driven only by the spirit in her and the power of will. A wonderful woman, *senhores*, brave and clear of head and worthy of such a man as Senhor Eduardo instead of the one she had married.

So the river boat, which was to have taken her and her husband out to God knows what sort of life, carried her instead with Senhor Eduardo, while Crooke stayed behind, buried near the *coronel's* headquarters. Senhor Eduardo would take her to Rio, where she might have care and sea

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breezes and become strong again before going back to North America. But before they went he told me and the *coronel*, his best friends, how it all had come about.

HE AND the lady Betty had cared much for each other in the States, but she had wealth and he had little, and he was by nature a rover and fond of adventure and could not bear the slavish life of the cities and the cheating and lying and stealing whereby so many men make money there. So he had sought gold in the mountains but found none, and he had done this and that but still remained poor.

Then Crooke, a city man who bought and sold rubber and other things, cunningly told him there was much money in rubber and much rubber in our country, and he might make a fortune there. It was just such a venture as Senhor Eduardo would jump into and he did jump into it—not knowing that in South America this Javary region is known far and wide as "the white man's grave."

With what little money he had he sailed away to try his luck among us.

Then, with him out of the way, Crooke had lied to the girl, telling her Eduardo had become vile and had married a low woman, and other things of the same sort. He showed her what seemed to be proofs of this—things which he no doubt had prepared himself.

So she had married him, in that queer way women sometimes have of doing things for which they are very sorry later on, and she had written Senhor Eduardo a bitter letter telling him of it. And what effect that letter had on him you know. But bad luck seemed to settle on Crooke from that day and soon he found himself forced to go into the country to which he had sent his rival.

So, *senhores*, you have the story of the Sloth. Love and hate and anguish made him a sloth and hate and love made him a man again; for the sight of Crooke shocked him into realization of what he had become and made him vow to live and be strong, if only to spite those who had put him where he was. And now, letters to the *coronel* have said, he and Mrs. Betty Armstrong are very happy among their own people. Life is odd, is it not?

Should you ever meet him, you will meet a man, the story of whose smashing fight against the wild men still is told at the headwaters of the Amazon. And to him and to the beautiful and brave lady Betty I ask you to give remembrance from their old friend Lourenço.

DEFIANCE

by James V. Murray

HOWL, Gale, howl!
Our hull is stanchest oak,
Well-wrought by honest folk.
Our deck is China teak—
No fear of seep nor leak.
Lash, Storm, lash!
Around our slender masts;
Slender, tall, yet strong.
And shriek your vicious song
Through rigging, laid in tar,
Of hemp from Luzon far.
Press, Gale, press!
Against our swelling breasts
Of Bedford duck snow-white.
Press on with all your might.
Whine, Storm, whine!
Whip up your tears of brine.
Your craving we deny.
Your frenzy we defy.
Howl, Gale, howl!

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WHEN CIVIC PRIDE HIT PIPE ROCK

by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Pirates from Piperock," "Local Option in Loco Land," etc.

I SETS there and looks at "Chuck" Warner and Henry Peck. Them two *hombres* are sore enough to qualify as first-class boils. Chuck sort of lolls sideways in his saddle, while he fondles a six-gun. Hen loops his rope up and hangs it around the horn of his saddle.

I shakes my head.

"Seen nothing of him?" asks Chuck.

"Ike wouldn't lie about it, Chuck," reproves Hen. "He don't like him no better than we do, I sure hope that 'Telescope' and 'Muley' had better luck than we did."

"Hope so, too," agrees Chuck, sliding his gun into the holster. "Give you eighty cents for his scalp, if you take it, Ike. *Adios.*"

I sets there on my pile of blankets and side-packs and watches them ride away into the mesquite. Then I get up and lets "Scenery" Sims roll out from under the pile of plunder.

"Gee gosh!" he squeaks. "You sure didn't let your feet drag, Ike. You squirshed all the wind out of me."

I don't like Scenery Sims. There's something in his squeaky voice that rasps upon a hidden cord in my nervous system, but when I sees him coming down through the mesquite, hopping like a rabbit, with his tongue lolling out, I just forgets my dislike for the little wart and gives him sanctuary under my blanket. Anyway, Scenery is from my own home town, and if you ain't got no civic pride you'd better herd sheep.

"Whyfor this hide-and-seek, Scenery?" I asks.

"Little pea," he squeaks. "Now you see it and now it ain't there. The Cross J bucks another man's game, and when they loses they opines to mete out punishment where punishment ain't due. *Sabe,* Ike?"

"Just like I do Aztec inscriptions," I replies. "Why and wherefrom comes the little pea which causeth astigmatism as to its whereabouts?"

"A circus," states Scenery. "A aggregation which is orphaned in favor of me and 'Dirty Shirt' Jones."

"I see it all," says I disgusted-like.

"You do like——!" wails Scenery. "Nobody can see it all, Ike, 'cause it ain't all finished yet," and then Scenery tunes up his E string voice, and tells me this little tale of zoological wo:

"Me and Dirty Shirt bucks the faro games of Granite town, Ike, and we immediate and soon finds that we are hung with horseshoes. We can't lose. When we hangs the padlocks on two of the best games we finds that we're ahead about fifteen hundred dollars.

"Then we meets the circus. This unparalleled bunch of wonders has left the beaten path and is hunting for hived-up dollars in the wilderness. This circus has ceased to pay salaries or feed bills, and when me and Dirty meets the owner we're lit up like a celebration.

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"He cries quite a lot on our necks. His performers has left him and he ain't got no money to keep on going. Says he hates to quit while a lot of folks ain't never feasted their eyes upon his collection of wonders, thereby cheating them out of an optical treat.

"Me and Dirty are in a receptive mood, and, feeling sorry for humanity, we finances this here show to Piperock, where liveth a lot of folks which ain't never seen the wonders of the jungles. We hands the boss five hundred dollars and he hands us the management of the whole works. All he retains is the pea privilege—dang his hide!"

"The pea does which?" I asks.

"Nut shells and a pea, Ike. You see the pea run under a shell and then you bets on your eyesight, which is faulty in the extreme. The bunch from the Cross J opines to beat this game to a frazzle. It takes that show feller about ten minutes to take three hundred and fifty from the four of them, and it leaves them wondering what's the matter with their eyes.

"Then this feller comes to me and Dirty and he tells us that upon a payment of five hundred more we can become sole owners of Bailey & Blaine's Unsurpassed Shows Combined, which are the only aggregation of its kind on earth. It was, Ike. Me and Dirty agrees that we can't be much worse off, so we buys him out.

"Then cometh old man Whittaker, who owns the Cross J. He bets on what he can see, and when he finds that his eye fools him he investigates with a six-shooter, and he finds that the pea ain't under any of the shells. Thereupon he proceeds to bend his gun over the circus person, who wails loud and long that he's just a hired man who is working for Mister Sims and Mister Jones, the owners of the circus, and as far as the little pea is concerned—he's getting paid for his manipulations. See why I lopes out here and hives up, Ike? I didn't even have time to bother with a horse."

"Where is Dirty Shirt?" I asks.

"Problematical, Ike. Telescope and Muley are good ropers."

"How does Piperock, as a whole, feel about it?"

"Piperock!" he squeaks. "Piperock ain't had time to feel. Piperock ain't got no love for them Cross J *hombres*, Ike, but Piperock's likes and dislikes ain't going to do us no good when we're standing on nothing and looking up a rope."

"Well," says I, consoling like. "You and Dirty own a circus."

"Huh!" snorts Scenery. "We've got a roarin' li-yun, Ike. We've got a small, two-story elephant, a zeebry, five educated dogs and a couple of work horses. We've got two wagons with pictures painted on the sides and we've got ten horns and a drum. We had three black bears, but the day we got into Piperock they busted loose and are now pesticating privately. Some folks might call it a circus, Ike, but to me she stands in the same relations to a circus that flour and water stands to biscuits: part of the ingredients are there."

I ain't been in Piperock for two months. Me and Magpie Simpkins are pardners in a little mine and I've been up there prospecting a little. I wouldn't been camping this close to Piperock, but one of my burros ate a gunny sack which had contained dynamite, and it affected its digestive apparatus to the extent that I has to stop until said animal convalesces.

It's about six miles to Scenery's domicile, but he opines he'd better go home, so I wishes him many happy returns of the day and he pilgrims on without thanking me for saving his worthless life. I packs up and hits the trail to Piperock, coming into town from the rear, and goes straight to our cabin.

I finds Magpie Simpkins, sheriff, setting on the steps, looking at a lot of colored pictures of animals, folks flying through the air, crockydiles eating up niggers in canoes and so forth. I sets down beside him and watches him thumb 'em over a while.

"Howdy, Ike," says he after a while.

"Same to you, Magpie," I replies. "Where did you get the loose-leafed natural history?"

"Invoices, Ike. Invoices of Bailey & Blaine's Unsurpassed Shows."

"Is them what it contains, Magpie?"

"Nope. Them is the things it don't contain. This attachment calls for everything what ain't in these pictures, and according to what I learned in school there ain't nothing left but a gump and a goofah."

"Attachment?" I asks.

"Uh-huh. Levied by Whittaker, Tolliver, Warner, Bowles and Peck, et al."

"Et all of what?"

"All that Wick Smith will stand for, I reckon," he grins. "Wick has got a big

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ed bill against the aggregation. Judge teele levies an attachment on account of kulduggery, alleged to have been played pon the aforementioned persons with the id of a deceptive pea. This here circus nd all it appears to contain are in hock, ke, and gosh dang the luck, I am, for the rst time in my young career, a dry nurse to menagerie. *Sabe?*"

THEN comes Dirty Shirt. He peers around the corner and then comes up, sliding close to the wall. Dirty looks like he had been run ragged.

"Huh-howdy, Ike," says he, and then to Magpie, "I demand protection for me and mine, sheriff."

"You're welcome," says Magpie tired-ike. "Got anything to guard?"

"My half of the circus."

Magpie hands him a sheet of paper and he pe-ruses same.

"My gosh! That ain't justice!" he yelps.

"Don't bark at me!" snaps Magpie. "Possession is nine points in the law, Dirty. You might sneak them out of the stable."

"Not me. Precaution is my middle name, Magpie. According to my version we've got something that ain't legal tender this side of Afriky. I stuck my head inside the door this morning and I know what I'm talking about. The lion yawned in my face and the elephant hit me on the head with his hose end. Circus,——! You attached something."

"I done my duty," says Magpie.

"Amen," squeaks a voice, and here is Scenery peering around the corner.

"Pshaw!" snorts Dirty. "I figured they'd catch you."

"Same to you," squeaks Scenery. "What are we going to do?"

"Might organize a circus of your own," suggests Magpie. "Folks would pay quite a lot to see you two—once."

"We ain't got no trapezer nor lion-tamer," wails Scenery. "I ain't worth a whoop on the hori-zontal bar, and when it comes to elephants I don't assay a trace."

"Feed bill is running high," states Magpie. "Lion eats a whole sheep for lunch, and that elephant sure upholsters himself with hay."

"My——!" wails Scenery. "What are we going to do, Dirty? Can't you do nothing but grin?"

"Do?" yelps Dirty. "Do? We're out a thousand dollars, got our circus attached for three hundred and fifty more and feed bills running up. You blasted little human squeak-box, do you think I'd set here and pay for the hay and sheep crop of this country if I could do anything to stop it?"

And the two of them lopes off up the street, calling each other nicknames every time they hit the ground.

That afternoon comes an interruption in the shape of "Sad" Samuels from Curlew. He intimates that the bank over there has been robbed and if we ain't got nothing else to do he'd admire to have the sheriff investigate it a little.

"You comes at a bad time, Sad," says Magpie. "I've got my hands full right now, but any other time I'd oblige you. Can't you put it off?"

"Oh, sure," says Sad. "If I hear of anybody who aims to rob the bank in the future, I'll try and have them arrange a time when you ain't busy. Can't you deputize Ike?"

"Hold up your hand, Ike," orders Magpie.

"I will not!" says I. "I've been sworn so many times, Magpie, that all a bad man has to say is—'Hold up your hand, Ike,' and up she goes. I'll be a deputy but not hanging on to a cloud."

I saddled my bronc after making a feed and then went down-town to meet Sad, who has been sampling glass-covered cheer. After while he opines aloud that he's tuned like a nightingale. Sad's tune is sour, so Buck asks him to desist. Then Sad opines he'll go back to Curlew, where they appreciates a soprano voice, and then he weaves over to the livery stable to get the bronc he left hitched to a rack outside.

Pretty soon I sees the door slide open slow-like and Sad peeks around. Then he closes the door behind him, stumbles over to his bronc, and I don't catch up with him until he's two miles out of town. I rides up beside him, but he don't turn. Sudden-like he raises one hand in a peace sign and says:

"Witness this, Ike. Witness the baring of a man's soul. I've been a fool to soak my hide in hooch, and now I know it. There comes a time when the scales falls off our eyes and we see things plain like. Never more can folks say that Sad Samuels is drunk again. I've seen snakes, Ike, but this is the first time that a striped jackass ever kicked me under an elephant."

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"What did the elephant do?" I asks.

"Don't chide me with questions, Ike," he wails. "It was all hooch hallucinations—that's all, but the elephant picked me up and bounced me into a nest of brass horns and I played the drum with my head. Lips that touch liquor shall never touch mine, Ike."

"Cheer up, Sad," says I. "No sober one would ever think of such a thing."

Me and Sad rode into Curlew and I went over to the bank that had been robbed. Old "Hassayampa" Harris, who owns the bank, has a grudge against Magpie Simpkins, Ike Harper and the whole town of Piperock. Hassayampa wanted to be sheriff of Yaller Rock county, and Magpie beat him by three votes. Hassayampa demands a recount, which assays four more in Magpie's favor, and the memory of it sours Hassayampa's soul.

"*M-m-m-yah!*" snorts Hassayampa when I asks about the robbery. "You and Magpie got a good alibi!"

"Iron-clad," says I, keeping cool.

"Naturally," says he mean-like.

"Any suspicions?"

"Did have before you showed up. Now I'm forced to make wild guesses."

"Of course," says I, "being the representative of the law, sent to investigate said robbery, it would be out of place and likely establish a precedent if I should ask if it was one man or more than one, and how much he got. Not that I care a whoop, Hassayampa. I ain't asking you how much you lost, 'cause you likely stole it anyway, and you don't lose nothing which was yours honestly, but it's the usual procedure in such cases, I reckon."

Hassayampa stares at me for a while and his face gets purple.

"Never mind," says he. "You'd never catch him before he had time to spend that eight hundred dollars and get that much more in debt, so I'll mark it off as a total loss. How's things in Piperock?"

"Great," says I. "Piperock's a progressive place. Too bad there ain't some spirit in Curlew."

"Spirit!" he snorts. "Spirits, you mean, Ike. Progressive,——! The only thing progressive around there is the graveyard."

"Yes, sir," says I. "This town is putrid from paralysis. Piperock is going to have a community circus. What do you think of that, eh?"

"Animals and so forth?" he asks doubtful-like.

"And so forth," says I. "Some spirit, eh? Dirty Shirt Jones and Scenery Sims invests in said aggregation and brings 'em to Piperock."

"And Piperock buys 'em?"

"Not yet but soon, Hassayampa. They're negotiating with Piperock. There's a chance that Paradise will make a try to annex said circus. Paradise is waking up to the value of circuses and may compete with the progressive Piperock. Them two towns are going ahead fast. You ought to move to one of them."

"Curlew is all right," says he. "She's a good town, believe me."

"Dead. Dead as a smoked codfish, Hassayampa."

"Not dead, Ike; just sleeping. Some day she'll awake and spread her wings. What do you reckon this circus to be worth?"

"Worth don't figure," says I. "It's the spirit of the thing. Well, I reckon I'll be drifting. If I see that hold-up man I'll talk to him until he's ashamed—for not taking more."

"Yes," says Hassayampa, follering me to the door. "You'll talk to yourself until folks will think you're a shepherd."

I AIN'T been in Paradise for a long time, so I heads down there and crooks a merry elbow at Mike Pelly's place. "Doughgod" Smith and Johnny Myers are there with Mike.

"Heard rumors of a circus up your way," states Mike. "Any truth in it, Ike?"

"Uh-huh. Some bunch of wonders, if you asks me. Be a credit to any city. I sure hopes that Piperock decides to take them."

Of course they immediate and soon craves details and I lets them into the proposition.

"Piperock is a lot progressive," says I. "And she'll do her best to hang on to them animals, but with a city like Curlew bidding for the features we'll have a hard time. Fine thing for a city to have a circus all their own, eh? New York has got a dinger, so they say, and, by grab, Piperock is coming to the front in wide loops."

"Haw!" says Doughgod. "You don't figure to compare Piperock with New York. New York has got thousands of folks, Ike."

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"Had to start on just a few, didn't she?" I asks. "Public spirit made New York what she is, boys, and Curlew and Piperock will be heard from."

"How about Paradise?" asks Mike, setting 'em up.

"Oh, Paradise," says I, "Paradise is—well, Mike, you've got to agree that this town is comatose. It ain't nothing but a huddle of houses, moved away from each other far enough to make a street. The train just stops here to give the engine a drink and dump off some stuff for Curlew or Piperock."

"Is that so!" snorts Mike. "Just houses, eh? Let me tell you what I'll bet you, Ike—aw-w-w-w!"

Mike shut up and got busy wiping glasses.

"When is these circus negotiations to take place?" asks Johnny, who follers me out to the hitch-rack.

"Tomorrow afternoon," says I, taking a chance, and then I lopes off up the road.

I ain't no ordinary liar. I may play the truth a little off key, but I hate to see Scenery and Dirty Shirt get the worst of the deal. They was doing it for humanity, wasn't they?

I'm cutting across Dancing Flat when I runs into "Tellurium" Woods, who is going to Piperock. Tellurium is a bald-headed, bushy-whiskered old pelican and he's riding an old roan outlaw which affects ring-bones and astigmatism.

We exchanges greetings and ambles along together. All to once my piebald bronc jumps plumb out from under me and I bounced a foot when I hit the ground. Tellurium experiences the same thing that I do and we sat there and made faces at each other. Then we both got up.

"Dangdest thing I ever heard of," states Tellurium, scratching his bald head. "Them two broncs just—Now I lay me down to sleep, I——"

I whirled at the first words of Tellurium's prayer and right then I establishes a world's record for cross-country running. I spurns sage and sand so copiously that everything is a gray blur under me.

I may be of a playful, peaceful disposition and slow to action, but by the whispering wolves, any old time that three black bears opine to make a *Goldilocks* out of me they've got to do it on the wing.

I reckon I beat that piebald bronc to the cabin by a nose and I sure scorns such things as bolts and locks. I picks myself out from under the bunk, hangs the door the best I can, lifts a shotgun off the hook and prepares to sell out to the highest bidder.

Pretty soon I hears a noise outside. I cocks that spray-weapon, guesses as near as I can to the location and tears a hole through the side of the door. I hears a sound out in front, so I runs to the window and sees Tellurium loping off down the trail, hanging on to his hip pockets and telling mankind how sore he is becoming.

I sets down to get my patience back, when Dirty Shirt comes up the trail and invades the cabin. He's looking for Magpie.

"I want to get rid of this bunch of misery, Ike," he complains. "I'd give it away. I ain't mercenary when it comes to menageries."

"Hang on," I advises him. "That circus is going to be in demand. Paradise and Curlew both desires to acquire it and maybe you can get a piece of money for it. Them two towns are sure progressive as tin canned pups. They opines that their town is public spirited enough to hanker for something out of the ordinary—something that folks will talk about—and they figures on coming up tomorrow afternoon to make a little bid. *Sabe?*"

Dirty nods like he sort of understands and then he says:

"What about Piperock, Ike? Ain't she as good as the others?"

"No spirit," says I. "This place is content to drift with the sand. When Paradise or Curlew begins to lord it over us we'll wake up, but not before, Dirty."

"My gosh, Ike, does Piperock know the state of affairs as felt by them two common villages?"

"Nope. They wouldn't do nothing if they did."

"Don't you never think it!" he snorts, and out of the door he goes.

In about half an hour Scenery Sims shows up. He clears his throat.

"Ike," says he. "This is a awful state of conditions which confront me. I ain't never killed nobody yet, but I'm receptive to killing Dirty Shirt Jones."

"Don't mind me," says I. "I ain't the sheriff. Whyfor the demise of Dirty Shirt, Scenery?"

"As you know," says he, clearing his throat, and hitching around in his chair.

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"as you know, Ike, I'm out—going fifty-fifty with Mister Jones—I'm out—counting this attachment and not to mention Wick's bill for board and bed—I'm out exactly six hundred and seventy-five dollars—not to mention mental harm—on the deal.

"Now, Ike, this here fool of a Dirty Shirt opines openly that he's a public spirit and offers to donate his half of the circus to Piperock to keep Curlew and Paradise from getting it. I won't give mine, Ike—dang me if I will! And you can't divide a elephant or a zeebry. With them animals it's a case of united we stand, divided we ain't worth skinning. Me and Dirty Shirt went over to Judge Steele. He tells me that I'm a poor citizen. What had I better do, Ike?"

"I've got a fine idea, Scenery," says I. "It's great. If anybody but you done it they'd likely get in trouble, but if you'll do it you'll earn the undying gratitude of everybody."

He hitches over to me and pats me on the knee.

"Tell it, Ike," says he, delighted like. "What will it cost?"

"The price of a .44 cartridge."

"That's cheap enough, Ike. What shall I do?"

"Go out to the town limits, Scenery. Find an old prospect hole, stand on the edge—and shoot yourself."

"Think you're funny, don't you?" he squeaks. "Think you're——"

"Hello, Ike."

We turns and there stands Chuck Warner in the doorway, slapping his chaps with his quirt. He's got a wide grin on his Roman-nosed face. Scenery walks sort of stiff-legged, like a bear, and when Chuck gives him a chance he ducks out and lopes back downtown. Chuck sets down and rolls a cigaret before he states his errand.

"Ike," says he, "I wonder how much a feller would have to pay for that bunch of circus stuff? Keep this under your hat and I'll tell you why I want to know. Me and the Cross J bunch has been talking it over and the old man's got the idea that he's a second Buffalo Bill. *Sabe?* That defunct circus would be a good foundation to build upon, Ike, and inside of a year we can build up a show that will make Bill Cody's look like a honkatonk. See the idea?"

"Dirty Shirt was trying to give his half away, the last I heard, but Scenery wants six hundred and seventy-five for his half. You might see Scenery, Chuck."

"According to the weight of our pocketbooks we'd better see Dirty Shirt," he laughs, and goes back to town.

Magpie comes home later and asks me about the robbery. I tells him about my talk with Hassayampa and he expresses regret that the robber only got eight hundred. The news appears to have spread that Curlew and Paradise and the Cross J all want that circus.

"Dirty is sore at everybody," states Magpie. "He shows so much public spirit that everybody treats him internally, until he gets to the point that he opines that nobody ever had anything on him as a showman, and now that the future looks rosy he'll be danged if he sells or gives away his half.

"Scenery never had any public spirit and he orates that he's going to sell his half tomorrow afternoon to the highest bidder and has retained Judge Steele to handle his interests.

"Tellurium Woods says he's going to kill you as soon as he gets them shot all picked out of his pants and then he's going to sue you for sicking them bears on him."

"Anything else?" I asks, and Magpie grins.

"Hassayampa and Sad are over from Curlew, and Mike Pelly, Doughgod Smith, Bill McFee and Johnny Myers are over from Paradise. Old man Whittaker and his Four Disgraces are here from the Cross J, and everybody is talking about anything on earth except circuses."

I DON'T go down-town the next morning. Magpie goes down, but I stuck around until afternoon, 'cause when Piperock gets popular I stays away in the morning. By noon they gets their good nature back, so along about two o'clock I wanders down the main street, sort of unconcerned-like, with a gun hung on both sides of me.

Being as I know most of the details I ain't got a whole lot of civic pride. Piperock is quiet. I sets down on the sidewalk and takes notes. A little ways down the street, setting on the sidewalk, is Dirty Shirt. He's got his hat tilted over one ear and on the sidewalk beside him is a big

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Sharps rifle. Between me and Dirty sets Scenery, humped over like a frog, with his elbows on his knees, and across his lap lays a sawed-off shotgun.

Over on the sidewalk in front of the Mint hall sets the Cross J bunch sort of listless-like. On the hitch-rack perches Paradise in all its glory and guns, and across from them, setting on Wick Smith's fence, is Hassayampa and Sad.

In front of the livery-stable, tilted back on a pair of chairs, is Magpie and Wick, acting as racks for a pair of Winchesters. I seen old Sam Holt come out of the door of his hotel, squint through the barrel of his old single-shot rifle and then set down behind a corner of his porch.

I seen Pete Gonyer shut the doors of his blacksmith shop and then poke out a pane of glass from his little front window. Peering over the top of "Buck" Masterson's false front I sees "Mighty" Jones, Buck Masterson and Art Miller.

She sure is a peaceful looking village. There ain't no love lost between any of the factions and I has a vision of myself with a shovel, attending the last sad rites of the whole blasted bunch.

Sudden-like I sees Judge Steele coming down the street. He's lit up like a cathedral and in his arms he carries a box about three feet square. Down the street he comes with his coat-tails flying in the breeze and his hard hat over one ear as he tries to look dignified. From the way his feet track I'd opine that the judge has looked upon the wine when it is red.

Right in front of the stable he stops and puts down the box. He wipes the perspiration off his classic brow, looks all around and then gets up on the box. Then he throws back his head, like a coyote saluting the moon, and his voice cackles out:

"Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye! The sale is about to——"

Bang! Bang!

The two explosions comes almost together. I sees a perfectly reliable and partly respectable exponent of Blackstone spill on the back of his neck and then get up dazed-like and walk in circles. The box is squeegeed a lot and splintered plentiful. The judge looks the box over and then puts up a yelp—

"Sheriff, I demands the arrest of Dirty Shirt Jones!"

Magpie has brought his gun around for action, but when the judge yelps he lowers his weapon and asks—

"How do you know he done the shooting, judge?"

"He's the only one of these belligerents that shoots a .50-110, that's why!" howls the judge. "That danged explosive bullet cut —— out of my rostrum!"

"Not wishing to expose my ability to shoot, but I'd admire to ask you what part of your anatomy that is," whoops Dirty.

"You quit that horse-play," squeaks Scenery. "Dang you, Dirty! I hired the judge to auctioneer my half of the circus. *Sabe?* You quit dynamiting my salesman or I'll bust you full of nails. This gun has got eight ten-penny nails in each barrel, and if you don't desist I'll nail you to the sidewalk and leave you there to starve. *Sabe?*"

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" from Pete Gonyer's shop. "Who's playing the fiddle?"

Ker-whang! Zing! Zee-e-e-el

That shop window shows how much that gun scatters at sixty feet.

"Show you who's playing a fiddle," squeals Scenery, reloading.

He crosses his legs unconcerned-like, with the sole of his right foot pointing toward the shop.

Bung! goes a gun inside the shop, and we sees Scenery turn over backward, pick up his shotgun and go limping and cussing around the corner. That bullet hit him in the bottom of his heel and it must have shocked him all the way up.

"Have a little sense!" snaps Magpie. "You're crazy if you think I'm going to set here and see murder done."

"Get away from the door and give the rest of the animals a chance," advises Telescope Tolliver. "You're holding up the sale."

"Ain't going to be no sale!" snaps Wick. "You fellers think you're coming up here to annex what belongs to us by possession, but you're dog-gone badly mistaken."

"Something has got to be done," whines Dirty. "It ain't something you can use for a keepsake."

"I have been duly appointed to make a sale," states the judge belligerent-like, and then he yowls full and free again:

"Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye! This here auction sale is about to begin!"

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He consults a piece of paper, and then—"How much am I bid for half of a convict jackass which is known as a zeebry?"

"Haw, haw, haw!" comes a whoop from the top of the saloon. "Which one of the Cross J punchers are you designating, judge?"

Zam! A gun explodes over in front of the Mint hall and I seen a sombrero sail off the top of the saloon.

"Going, going, gone!" snorts Hassayampa. "Give two-bits, judge."

"Two-bits!" yelps Dirty. "Why, dang you, Hassayampa, that animal is worth a thousand dollars!"

"Intact," admits Hassayampa. "In sections—not anything, Dirty."

"Don't I hear more than two-bits?" howls the judge. "Ain't nobody going to offer more than a measly two-bits?"

Clang! Clang! Clang! Hassayampa swung around on the fence and hit that little bell on top of the Mint hall three times in a row, which is some shooting with a .45, if anybody asks you.

The judge cranes his neck at the bell, looks around at the crowd and then clears his throat with difficulty.

"Sold!" he gasps. "Bring out the sale, Scenery."

But Scenery ain't in evidence, so he turns to Dirty Shirt—

"Dirty, you being part owner, I hereby orders you to lead it out."

"Which end has been sold?" asks Dirty.

"So long as feed is high I'll take the rear end," grins Hassayampa.

"I'd admire to make a little bid on the front end," observed Mike Pelly.

"If you think you're going to pull off any funny stuff with the representatives from Curlew town you'd better go slow," cautions Hassayampa.

"The same kind of greetings from Piperock," says Buck. "We aims to do our dangdest to remain pure in heart and true to our principles, but our gorge ariseth at anything shading proper etiquette. Hassayampa, you intimidates the auctioneer to the extent that you annexes half of a zeebry for a measly two-bits, and if you ain't desirous of hearing your swan song you'll keep still from now on. *Sabe?*"

"Which don't admit that you hogs the rest of the chances, Buck," says Whittaker mean-like. "The Cross J will get a square deal if we has to fight the battle of Amargideon all over again. Judge, you keep on asking questions until we're all through offering silver sacrefices, and if anybody kills you they'll have to answer to me. Go ahead."

"Hear ye, hear ye, year ye!" croaks the judge. "How much am I bid for the front end of a zeebry?"

NOBODY cares to make a bid, so he repeats the formula.

"Well, start something!" snorts Buck, shifting his six-gun, while he wipes the palm of his right hand on his leg. "Ain't nobody going to make a bid?"

"Paradise awaits a lead," says Mike Pelly calm-like.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" whoops Pete Gonyer from inside his shop. "I'll bid ten cents.

Bung! Whee-e-e-e! Zee-e-e-e-e!

We can hear nails buzzing all around and then Scenery sticks his head out of the loft window.

"Show you!" squeaks Scenery. "Show you how to drive my leg half-way up through my jaw!" And then he looks down at the judge, "Sold anything yet, judge?"

"I—I—I—"begins the judge.

"Half the zeebry," yells Hassayampa. "Come down and get your two-bits."

"Two-bits?" wonders Scenery. "You—you bought my share of that animal for two-bits?"

Scenery is hanging half-way out of that loft window and his vocal cords are tuned for a Spanish fandango.

"Ab'stively," nods Hassayampa.

"Coerced me," wails the judge. "He—he rung the bell three——"

"Co——!" squeaks Scenery, and up comes that riot gun.

I seen Hassayampa and Sad fall backward off the fence and I hears the whizz of nails as Scenery unhooks both barrels at them. A pistol explodes behind the fence and I sees Magpie's hat sail off his head.

Magpie gets up, recovers his hat and peers at the hole in it. Then he slides back the stable door, peers inside for a while, picks up a piece of black rag and nails it to the door. Then he turns to Hassayampa.

"Hassayampa, you ought to be both sorry and sued. That bullet killed Dirty's half of the zeebry and your half died."

"Dang your hide!" squeals Scenery,

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dancing up and down in the loft. "I'll sue you! You knowed that sale wasn't legal, so you killed my zeebry. I'll sue you!"

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roars Pete Gonyer, sticking his head out of the shop window. "Bring a cross suit, Hassayampa. It was through the front end that your end came to its demise. Haw! Haw! Haw!"

Magpie didn't shut that door tight. It must have been open about a foot, but Wick leans his chair back against the opening and is enjoying the conversation, when all at once he lets his rifle slip off his lap. His body seems to buckle at the waist, and then he straightens up like a man what has sat on a tack, and he lights going away from there.

"*Yeo-o-o, huh-h-h-h, guh-h-h-h!*"

That's as near as I can come to the noise we heard, and that roaring lion's face appears at the open door.

"Hear ye, hear ye, hear ——" begins the judge foolish-like, and then he whirls and lopes right into Magpie and they both goes rolling.

I got a glimpse of folks going away, but I'm too close to think of any place to go. I sets right there and looks that hunk of jungle junk right in the face.

"Dud-don't shoot, Ike," comes a squeaky whisper from the loft, and I sees Scenery lean out with a rope in his hand.

"Don't shus-shoot," stutters Dirty, standing there with a vacant look on his face and his thumbs hooked in the sleeve-holes of his vest.

"He's vuv-valuable, Ike—you know it? Comes from Afriky. King of——"

"*Swush!*" goes the rope.

Scenery never was much with a rope, but of course he has to make the one perfect cast of his young life and the noose tightens around the lion's neck.

Scenery had the lion, as far as the rope was concerned, but he neglected to snub the rope to anything. You've got to snub a lion. But then you can't expect Scenery to know everything about lions.

That beast had all kinds of room to go other directions but of course it had to come my way. I got an underside view of that mangy critter and I saw Scenery sail out into the unstable atmosphere like a big flying squirrel.

I think the lion and Scenery both hit me, 'cause I felt two distinct shocks, and the next thing I know I'm laying on my back with my feet on the porch in front of Buck's place. I've got a burned place across my neck where a rope has chafed, and the whole seat of my pants is rubbed out. Scenery is setting against the wall, tying and untying knots in a two-foot piece of rope.

"What happened?" I asks.

"I dud-don't know yet. They had one—one chance, Ike—the rear window."

"Who? The lion?"

"Lion, —— !" he whispers shrill-like. "Lions don't need chances. The bunch from Paradise just got in there ahead of the lion, but they didn't have time to shut the door."

"Sanctified spirits frumenti!" gasps Magpie, setting down beside us.

"Where is everybody?"

"Uh?" says Scenery vacant-like.

"Squeaky critter!" snorts Magpie. "I asks where everybody has went?"

"Oh!" says Scenery and points inside.

Magpie is my pardner, and I like him. When I'm feeling very well I'd stand between him and trouble, but right now I ain't got nothing heroic in my bosom. I sets right there and lets him go inside, and right behind him goes them five *hombres* from the Cross J. They looks mean-like at me and Scenery and closes the door behind them.

Me and Scenery gets up and peers inside the window. There is Magpie and them five *hombres* standing at the bar, waiting to be served. That lion must a thought the pool table was a lair, 'cause he comes out from under there, shakes himself all over and coughs once. Man, that animal had any lung disease I ever hear backed off the map.

"Sic 'em!" squeaks Scenery.

Magpie hit the top of the bar and then I lost sight of him, but I reckon he hived up on the back bar. Chuck touched the top of a card table went from there to the top of the pool table and then makes a high dive over the top of the little partition which surrounds Buck's boodwah.

Hen Peck and Telescope Tolliver comes out through the window together, skids on their hands and knees in the street and then clears Wick's fence, a dead heat, with three feet of atmosphere under them.

Muley Bowles got one foot through a chair, which is some handicap for a two

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hundred and forty pound person, and then he crashed down into a corner with the chair on top.

Old man Whittaker don't even try to escape. He sets down on the bar-rail weak-like and him and the roaring lion smells at each other. Then we sees the lion raise its head and look high above the bar, where Magpie has disappeared.

Bung! I reckon Magpie threw a bottle of hooch at the king of beasts. It was a great shot. It hit old man Whittaker on the head, slithered off and hit the lion on the nose.

"Billiard!" whistles Scenery, and just then Hassayampa and Sad comes around the corner.

"What's going on in there?" demands Hassayampa, pointing at the door.

"Magpie's playing billiards," whispers Scenery.

"Billiards, eh?" grunts Hassayampa and him and Sad clumps right in and shuts the door behind them.

Me and Scenery looks at each other, and then we both sighs deep.

"Civic pride ——" begins Scenery and just then comes a yelp and a crash and Magpie falls out through the window and sets there on the sidewalk, blinking like an owl.

"Shot high," he explains, indicating height with his hand.

"A feller can't hang on to a wall with his toe nails and shoot straight. I—I hit Hassayampa with a quart of gin."

"The lion?" questions Scenery. "Where is it?"

"Went out the back door."

"Who opened the back door?" I asks.

"Sad," says Magpie. "He didn't open it though, Ike. He—he still had it in his arms when he hit Buck's corral fence."

"My ——!" squeaks Scenery, pointing across the street. "Take a look!"

Out of the open barn door comes the elephant, and behind it is Dirty Shirt, punching it along with a pitchfork.

OLD MAN WHITTAKER and Hassayampa comes out of the saloon door, arm in arm. They've sure got vacant looks on their faces, but when they see the elephant they turn right around and march back into the saloon.

"Where do you think you're going, feller?" yells Pete Gonyer, opening the door of his shop.

"Whoa!" yelps Dirty, grabbing the beast by the tail. "What say?"

"Where you going?"

"Home. Got to save something out of the wreck, ain't I? Gosh, I——"

Here comes Sad out of the alley between the saloon and the blacksmith shop. From the looks of him he didn't get entirely away from the lion. He's still got one sleeve of his shirt left. The two halves of his vest are draped over his elbows and he carries them like they're heavy. Sad seems to be peering into the future as he pokes out into the street, and he almost bumps into the elephant.

"Port your helm, dag-gone you!" whoops Dirty, making a pass at Sad with his fork. "Don't you run over my packy-derm."

"Ex-cuse me," apologizes Sad, trying to take a hat off his bare head. "Which way is that thing going?"

"Nun-north," stammers Dirty.

"By cripes!" explodes Sad, looking at the elephant, which is standing crossways of the street. "I—I thought it went endways. My mistake."

"You take Rajah right back!" squeaks Scenery. "He ain't your elephant, Dirty."

"Front half is mine," declared Dirty. "You keep your half here if you can, Scenery Sims, but my half goes with me. *Sabe?*"

Just then the old judge rises up from behind Wick's fence, and the old boy looks like he had been taking a nap in a threshing machine. He climbs over and weaves over to us.

"Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye!" he croaks foolish-like, but just then comes an interruption.

Up the street comes the king of beasts, searching deep into his soul to tell how scared he is, and right behind him comes Mike Pelly, Doughgod Smith and Bill McFee. Their broncs are sure treading on the lion's tail and the three men have got out their ropes for what they may encompass.

You can haze a bronc after wolves, lions or bear and it will foller plumb close, but elephants is tabu with broncs. The lion goes past us like a yaller streak, and fades into the landscape, but the broncs has different ideas on the subject.

Bill McFee's mount, which is blind in one eye, jams square into the elephant. Doughgod casts his rope. Doughgod is

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what I'd call a pot-roper. He casts just for general results and everything is grist that comes to his mill. I ducked but all too late. His bronc goes up against Pete's shop and Ike Harper does a head-spin with a rope around his knees.

I reckon I hit fairly hard, 'cause when I manages to sneeze the dust out of my mind I finds that I'm laying on my face in the dust and beside me, setting on the saddle on the ground, is Doughgod.

The elephant is standing there like a big wrinkled hunk of India rubber and prostrate between its front legs is Bill McFee. As I look at Doughgod he points his pistol at the elephant and pulls the trigger, but there's only a click. He shakes his head at Bill, and sighs deep-like.

"Do the best you can, Bill," says he, sad like. "I shot him six times and the bullets bounced back every time."

"Load up again, Doughgod," whispers Bill. "Keep stinging him and maybe he won't want to lay down. I can't help myself none, 'cause he's standing on the slack of my pants. Can't you do nothing, Ike?"

"I've done my part," says I. "Everything from now on is ex-tem-per-aneous with me."

"You're got a hard heart, Ike," says Bill sort of muffled-like, and just then I hears a horn blare off tune and I turns to see that bunch from the Cross J plodding up the street. At their head is Hen Peck, trying to play on one of them sliding horns, and bringing up the rear is Scenery Sims, and Scenery has got a rope around his neck.

"I ain't never done nothing and I ain't going to never do nothing!" declares Scenery at the top of his voice.

"The last half sounds like the truth," opines Doughgod. "Let's go and see where they're going to hang him, Ike."

"Don't leave me alone!" wails Bill. "Don't——"

Bang! Bunk! I hears the whang of a rifle and I'm here to state that I heard that .50-110 bullet explode against the armor plating of that elephant. The elephant's ears go forward like a pair of sails and he sort of shudders deep in his soul.

Then he bows his back, reaches down with his trunk and winds same around the shoulders of Bill McFee, and when Bill lands twenty feet away on his hands and knees he ain't got no more pants on than a new-born papoose. Yes, sir, that animal shucked him clean.

A STUNG elephant seems to want to push against something, I reckon, 'cause this one went over to Pete Gonyer's shop, set its forehead tenderly against that part of it which is just under the splintered window and then begins to expand. Man, he just turned that shop around so it's facing the alley, handcuffs himself with an old wagon wheel which is shy a few spokes, and then we all left to hear Scenery's last words.

I seen Dirty lean his old gun up against the fence, and then he goes weaving down toward the livery stable door, while Wick crawls on his hands and knees over to where he can get under the sidewalk out of the sight of mankind.

"Where you going, Dirty?" I yells, and he stops.

"I'm tired of bloodshed, Ike," says he airy-like. "There ain't going to be no sale this day and date."

Then me and Doughgod trots up to Sam Holt's hotel, where groweth our one lone tree. Mostly everybody are there, except Magpie, and he shows up just after we gets there. Telescope is trying to climb the tree to put the rope over a limb, but he's imbibed too much. Hassayampa and old man Whittaker are setting on the ground, holding hands, and both of them have beautiful swellings on their heads.

"Who's a good climber?" asks Telescope.

"Help! Help!" squeaks Scenery, clawing at the rope.

"Does he merit hanging?" asks Magpie.

"All the pangs," states Muley. "He set his danged lion on us."

Old Judge Steele pushes his way to the front and holds up his hand.

"It ain't cons'tutional," he states. "'Cording to personal observation and extensive treatise on natural history a lion don't need to be set. Nobody ever sets a lion. While there ain't no precedent to go by, I'd adjudicate that it was bad luck, a miscarriage of fate or something that a he-mortal has nothing in common to do with. I gives you this advice free of charge," continues the judge, hauling out a gun about a foot long, "for what she's worth, but if she ain't convincing—cut your wolf loose and come howling.

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"Judge Steele upholds the law verbally as long as she's worth his while, but when words fails me I resorts to barbaric methods to defend my own town. Scenery Sims is of Piperock, and I rises or sinks with him."

"Take that rope off Scenery's neck or there will be a lot of cannibal food go to waste!" yelps Magpie. "You foreigners comes up here and tries to trample us natives under foot. You covets said circus to the extent that you're willing to slay one of our prominent citizens to gain your bitter ends. Set a lion on you! ——!"

"I'd like to know who started this anyway?" whines Scenery. "Who ever invited all these towns up here to quarrel over our circus?"

Old Hassayampa gets up and limps to the front.

"Ike Harper says to me, 'Piperock's progressive,' " states the old pelican. "He says to me——"

"He says it to us, too," says Mike Pelly, "Ike says——"

His voice trails off to a whisper. We've been so busy with our own troubles that we've forgot the elephant and there it stands with its trunk sort of reaching over Mike's shoulder.

There's silence for several seconds and then Buck Masterson says sort of conversational-like:

" 'Slim' Seeley tells me that the feed is getting thin over on the Medicine creek breaks. Reckon a little rain would help."

Muley Bowles nods, picks up a stick and begins to whittle careful-like. Hen Peck slips that horn up and down and then puckers up his lips to whistle a tune that won't seem to come.

"I knowed a feller once——" begins Magpie, but just then we hears one awful wail coming from down the road and a cloud of dust heaves into sight.

At the same time there comes a rattle and clank behind us and a dog's voice raised in protest.

We turns to see what menaces our rear, and here comes them five educated dogs and each one is flaunting a tin can on its tail. A tin can well tied will make an ignoramus out of the smartest dog on earth.

Then we looks up the road and here it comes. Out of that cloud of dust comes a mangy lion, howling like a scared pup and running a dead heat with three perspiring black bears, which are showing the king of beasts a few things about high and handsome running, and behind them comes Doughgod's pack of bear-dogs.

Each and every dog is praising himself at the top of its voice and things are timed just right for them to meet the tin canned dogs right in our midst.

I've dreamed of such things and it impressed me so much that I walked in my sleep and fell down a prospect hole, but by the horns on the moon, I never thought I'd live long enough to see such doings in real life.

I'm bow-legged. Maybe my folks persuaded me to walk too early in life, and again maybe I've spent too many years in the saddle, but no matter. I've got curved extremities. Maybe a bear, walking with complete confidence and care, could go between my legs without disturbing my sense of balance, but a big black bear, running at the top of its voice, don't consider curves and angles, and Ike Harper went so high in the air that he could look over the top of the curtains on the second floor of Sam Holt's hotel.

I ain't no peeker. I just tells that to illustrate the height to which that bear hoisted me—and I was head down when I peeked in, too. I looked down once as I was coming back to earth. It was only a glimpse but I sure seen things. I've heard that when a man's life is about to depart from within him his whole past rushes up before him, but if this was my past I ain't noways fit to die.

BELOW me is the greatest mulligan of man power and brute force I ever seen. She's just one mess of hauling, clawing, surging cross between the cow-country and the jungles of Afriky. The elephant is on its hind legs in the center, making a noise like an overloaded boiler, and down into the melting pot comes Ike Harper.

I bounced when I hit the elephant and I hears the yip of a dog when I hit the earth. I gets yanked, hauled and stepped upon, and then something hit me and my lamp gets trimmed so low that she don't burn.

Then Spring seems to come. I hears the rustling of the growing grasses and the song of little birds. I awake.

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A black bear is sniffing in my ear and I hears Scenery's little voice raised in song—

"Twinkle, twinkle little staw-har, twinkle, twinkle—"

I sets up and looks around. Me and Scenery are close to each other. In fact, my left foot and Scenery's right are linked together with a rope, the rest of which is tangled around the bear's neck and shoulders, and that bear is the picture of misery.

Honest to grandma, there's tears in the bear's eyes. I see what looks like a rug hanging on a limb of the tree, but a second glance shows it is the mortal remains of the roaring lion. It appears to have been plastered so hard against the tree that it ain't fit for nothing but a skinning-knife.

"Elephant," says Scenery. "Elephant slammed king of beasts on the ground, Ike. Then he wipes his feet on him and finally hangs him up to dry."

I tried to yank my foot loose and it rattles a can which is looped in the rope.

"Quit that!" squeaks Scenery. "Don't antagonize him, Ike."

"You got a knife?" I asks and Scenery's eyes open wide.

"Never thought of that," says he and then he carefully saws the rope off our feet. We inches back for quite a distance and then we gets up and pilgrims toward the saloon, and right behind us comes the bear. Me and Scenery ain't scared and the bear seems to have perfect confidence in us.

Then we meets Dirty Shirt. Dirty looks like he had seen the last of everything. He nods at us and then kicks the bear in the ribs. Said bear gives Dirty a sad look and points off across country.

Sudden-like the earth seems to sort of shudder and we hears the tinkle of glass as a window somewhere in town falls out. Dirty takes off the remainder of his hat and bows his head.

"There goes the last of Bailey & Blaine's," says he. "He may be strong but he's met his match."

"Meaning?" squeaks Scenery.

"The elephant. I follers him out to Art Miller's prospect. That fool packyderm hankers for something to push against and I left him feeling around Art's powder house. He—he must 'a' pushed."

The three of us wobbles over to the saloon and goes inside. Magpie, Hassayampa, Mike Pelly and old man Whittaker are there leaning against the bar and they sure look like they'd had a plenty. It's a representative group of Yaller Rock county.

We don't no more than get in when here comes Judge Steele. The old pelican takes the rim of his hard hat off his ear, reaches inside his torn coat and produces a dirty paper.

"Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye!" he croaks. "I hereby adjudicates that this attachment is null and void. Do I hear a dissenting voice?"

"In the name of the Cross J, I answers nay," replies Whittaker. "Tear it up, judge, and have a drink."

And then they came struggling in. The lame, the halt and those who wish they had halted came drifting in. Some are wearing vacant expressions and few clothes and some haven't even the vacant expression. They all crowds their way to the bar and asks in whispers for their favorite poison. I don't reckon there's a gun left in the whole crowd, and a lot of them have even lost their belts.

"Is everybody's gug-glass filled?" asks Muley Bowles hoarse-like.

"To the brim, and some has put on sideboards," says Buck sad-like.

"Then," says Muley, "I ask everybody to drink this toast:

"Here's to the roarin' lion,
  Here's to the striped jack,
Here's to the Injy rubber ox,
  May they never more come back.

Here's to the little bearlets,
  To the dogs that Dirty canned,
To the city circus vanished,
  To the Wild West show we planned.

Let us live from now together,
  In peace let us always dwell——"

Muley sets down his glass and scratches his head.

"I can't seem to finish it, boys. I reckon my rhymer got bent a little."

"Let me finish it," says Magpie wise-like. "How's this:

"Let us live from now together,
  In peace let us always dwell,
Save lead for rank outsiders,
  Let civic pride go plumb to ——."

"Amen," says Judge Steele. "Whom the gods would cement they first make mad as ——. Let us drink it standing."

Which was a superfluous request.

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CAPTAIN TRISTTAM'S MIRACLE

by Charles Beadle

Author of "The White Frog," "The Tree of Life," etc.

"ALL gone, sir!"

As the mate on the forecastle head turned toward the bridge holding up both hands, Captain Tristtam wrenched down the brass handle of the telegraph to "slow astern" swung it over and back twice, leaving the pointer at "stop," the signal that, after the few revolutions necessary to give the required "bite" on the anchor, the engines would no longer be required. Then, walking to the starboard end of the bridge, he peered over the dodger at a small steam-launch maneuvering for the rope ladder.

"Hope to goodness it's not the River," he muttered, meaning the Port of London, and frowned at the bluff of Gibraltar which appeared like a colossal snail crawling across the Spanish plain.

He descended the steps and stood chewing a half-smoked cigar at the entrance to the chart-room built beneath the upper bridge, waiting for the agent to bring the cabled orders for which he had come.

He was a stocky man; rather a lumpy red nose stuck out from a beefy complexion of the English sailor; of rugged features, with small gray eyes with the frequent mistiness which told of eyes failing in the perpetual fight with wind and rain. The shoulders were slightly stooped, not with a scholarly suggestion but one of bucking the elements, fortune and men; an attitude which was echoed in the set of the grizzled beard and mustaches, indicating resolution rather than aggressiveness.

A character which was revealed in his position of stolid compromise, inasmuch as he would not go forward to meet the agent, yet neither would he secure the added dignity that his chart-room would afford.

At the sound of a high voice with a Welsh singsong accent the old man's shaggy eyebrows rose. Instead of the smooth and explanatory face of the Maltese-Greek agent, on the top of the ladder appeared one of the owners. Captain Tristtam's surprize was only betrayed by the removal of the cigar as he stepped forward toward a man of about forty, in a yachting outfit, whose anxiously hard eyes, in a clean-shaven face, suggested a distant suspicion.

"Ah, cap'n, how are you?" he exclaimed suavely, extending his jeweled hand with a certain jovial condescension. "Didn't expect to see me, eh?"

"Hadn't no idea, Mr. Harper," replied Captain Tristtam, clasping an invertebrate hand. "Won't you come in, sir?"

"Certainly, cap'n, certainly, an' have a drop of grog, eh? Well, cap'n, you're for Bristol. How's that suit you, eh, eh?"

"Very welcome, sir. Shall be glad to be near my little gal. She's at Clifton, you know, Mr. Harper." Captain Tristtam's eyes brightened at the news. "Very

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pleased, indeed. I'll be only too glad when we pick up the *Lizard*."

"Umgh, umgh," muttered the partner, staring at the old man's stolid back as he opened a mahogany bookcase filled with nautical books and long chart-cases.

"Confound the man," muttered Captain Tristtam as he placed tumblers, a whisky bottle and a box of cigars on the table. "'Scuse me, sir." And, striding to the door, he bawled, "Stew-ard! Stew-ard!"

After a momentary pause came a faint—"Ai ai, sir!" and the old man strode back to the locker seat, mumbling about the impossibility of getting an intelligent steward. "All confounded dagoes or squareheads," he muttered wrathily as the steward appeared, a pallid straw-haired creature in a soiled apron, whose short hawk-nose seemed to quarrel with the white-lashed eyes.

"Cigar, sir?" Captain Tristtam thrust forward the box. "Wish I was back in sail sometimes," he grumbled as they waited for the missing seltzogene. "Long voyages give a chance to break in these dock-scourings. Never keep a crowd mor'n one trip, and what's the use o' that?"

"Umgh. Umgh," commented the owner, trimming the cigar with a gold clipper. "Still, you can't blame 'em, cap'n. Old ship, isn't she." He laughed forcedly as if at a devil of a joke. "—— old tramp, you may say, eh, eh?" Captain Tristtam mumbled inaudibly. "Not very comfortable for you, eh, cap'n? Still, the old tub's paid for herself time and again. Just temporary, y' know, just temporary, eh, cap'n?"

Captain Tristtam looked inquiringly, as the owner evidently expected a reply.

"Just so. Just so," he remarked, drumming stubby fingers on the table. "By the way, cap'n, excellent cigar this, excellent," he added as the steward came in. "Umgh. Ah, thanks, thanks, cap'n! By the way, cap'n, remember our little chat before you sailed, eh?"

The captain's eyes wandered in the effort of recollection.

"Ah, well, perhaps little difficulty. I mean between gentlemen. Haven't worked long together, have we? No, to be sure. Ha! Ah! By the way, quite forgot to tell you we've decided to build—in fact had three keels down when you left. None of your God-forsaken tubs. The real thing. Five-thousand-tonners. Modern fittings. Nine-knotters. Speed and capacity. That's the thing nowadays. 'Sides, you'd be more comfortable than you are here, y'know, cap'n, eh, eh?"

AGAIN the old man's eyes lighted up.

"You mean, sir, that you're thinking of a bigger command for me soon?"

"Certainly, certainly, cap'n. Ah. Umgh. Here's to your next command, cap'n!" he added, raising his glass of grog.

Captain Tristtam rose stiffly and bowed.

"I thank you, sir. Indeed I hope that—that I shall be able to appreciate your—your appreciation. Good fortune to the firm, sir!"

"Thank you, thank you, cap'n. Very kind of you. I'm sure we shall. No doubt of it."

Captain Tristtam sat down heavily.

"You won't be coming home with us, sir?" he inquired struck with a new idea.

"Oh no. Certainly not!" said Mr. Harper hurriedly, as if startled by the suggestion. "I mean, can't be done, you know, cap'n. Should be delighted, but business is business, eh, eh? Ha! Ha! Just ran down from Bilbao to look you up, you know. Thinking of taking up the ore trade. Ore's going ahead. Yes, yes. Ugh." He finished the grog in one gulp. "Ah—oh, thanks, cap'n! Excellent whisky! Glenlivet, eh? You know! Ah! Ha! Just a wee drop of the soda. Pity to spoil a good thing, eh? Now cap'n, about business. Umgh. Umgh." He exhaled smoke. His eyes hardened as he shot a questioning look at the old man. "You know, cap'n, this —— old tub—no economy. Swallows the profits. Freight's rotten these days. Improving though, improving. I mean for the old-fashioned types, eh, eh? Look at your bunkers! Eat up half your capacity! Lines all wrong. Board of trade, I mean. —— it, cap'n, might as well run a yacht! Look at the Double Ex. Can't compete with 'em, eh, eh? But she's paid—in the old days. Oh yes, I grant you that! But now——!"

"Why not sell her, sir?"

"Sell her? Good God, what d'you think we'd get for her? Norwegians, Swedes or Spanish, but—*pff!* Bagatelle! Want to pick up ruins for nothing—a song—and—and insure 'em, sink 'em, you know, eh?"

"Mebbe. But wrong 'uns," grumbled the old man. "I don't hold with these foreign

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lines. Same as in the East, sir. These Chinese pick up old tubs and—and—well, I could have had a dozen commands at that price, but I'm a God-fearing man, and by ——, sir, I've never lost a ship—except when I was burned out off Valparaiso."

"Umgh. Umgh. Unfortunate. Very. Never mind, cap'n, you're in steam now. Umgh."

The owner exhaled smoke and stared speculatively at his captain, who, after a puzzled glance, began to fidget with the cigar box.

"I'm afraid, sir," he began, "that you're rather disappointed with her looks, but well, you cut me very short on paint and——"

"Oh, —— the paint!" exclaimed Mr. Harper. "She'll look just as well without paint. I mean—" as if recalling himself—"we're not out for appearances, Cap'n Tristtam, we're out for results. You want a new command, don't you?"

The shaggy eyebrows rose.

"Why, yes, sir, I—of course I'm not as young as I was, but——"

"Oh, —— your age, man!" exclaimed Mr. Harper. "What's that to do with it? You've spent too long at sea, cap'n—I mean—" hastily—"you ought to have a shore job. Enjoy the fruit of labor, y' know. —— it, man, she's well insured."

"Oh, I don't doubt that," said Captain Tristtam. "I believe in insurance—even against the acts of God, I mean, sir, in the business sense. Of course, she needs dry-docking and her engines, so Mr. Tighte tells me, won't last——"

"Oh, —— your engines!" exploded Mr. Harper as if exasperated. "Sorry, cap'n, I mean you should consider the interests of your employers."

"I trust that I have done so in every way, sir. Even in the sacking contract——"

"Sacks! Oh God, man, what are you talking about? I tell you she's well insured. More than double what she's worth to tell the truth. Do you recollect our little talk before you sailed—with the gov'nor I mean? Oh ——!"

"Did you call me, sir?" inquired the straw-haired steward from the chart-room door.

"No, no," said Captain Tristtam, blinking at the man. "I didn't call you."

"Sorry, sir! Sort 'o 'eard some one calling. Must 'a 'eard that there winch going."

"Get out!" barked Mr. Harper.

The yellow pate disappeared.

"I was asking you, cap'n, whether you recall that little talk we had, you and me and the gov'nor, before you sailed? You do? Eh? Well—we expected results before this. That's why I ran down to—er—remind you."

"Remind me? Results?" queried the old man, raising puzzled eyelids.

"——, man!" snapped Mr. Harper irritably. "Can't you take a hint? D'you want the —— thing written, sealed and witnessed before an attorney? There can't be any trouble. The underwriters won't even smell a rat. You've got a clean slate. That's why we picked you, confound it! And we've always been careful. Safe as a house. As long as you understand, that's all right; but I want to know because we need an extra haul to help even up the cost of these new boats. Is it all right, cap'n?"

"All right!" repeated Captain Tristtam, blinking at the owner painfully, as if struggling to grasp an idea that was beyond him. "I don't think I quite understand, sir."

"Understand! ——!" Mr. Harper stared incredulously. "Ah! Percentage; is that it? You have the first boat off the slips, of course, and we'll be generous. But —— it, man, you don't expect a written contract, do you? Ha! Ha! Ha!" Still the old man stared, clutching the glass of grog with gnarled fingers. "It occured to me by the way that—that you had decided that it would be safer the other side of the Straits. Dirty November weather and that, eh, eh? Is that it? Maybe you're right."

"Dirty weather," repeated Captain Tristtam slowly, twisting the glass round and round. Then he looked up with a peculiar tightening of the corners of the eyelids. "Do you mean, Mr. Harper, that you wish me to wreck her and cheat the underwriters? Is that it?"

"Oh, tut, tut, cap'n, you put it very bluntly! Ha! Ha! Where would half the shipping kings be if that were not a usual affair with a dirty, worn-out tramp? Why——"

"Not under my command, Mr. Harper. Never. I've had a clean slate all my life and by ——" the grog glass came down with a crash on the table— "I'm not going to dirty it for the likes of you."

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"Oh, come, come, cap'n; that was understood, —— it. You didn't think we were giving you the command for nothing, did you? Every other master with us has at least five hundred invested and you——"

"Look-a-here, Mr. Harper," said the old man, rising and leaning over the table. "I just want you to understand that I'll have nothing to do with it. If you want a crook you can put him in as soon as ever we reach an English port, but I'm on contract with you and you can't touch me until then, understand that, and I'm going to bring this dirty old tramp, as you call her—run on starvation wages, rotten rations and no equipment—into port, and then I'm finished with you. I haven't got money, but I've got a God to answer to, and by heavens I'll not soil my hands for a blooming penny."

AS THE captain leaned farther and farther over the table in his rising wrath the owner rose and backed away.

"Come, come, cap'n, be reasonable! Take a little while to think it over. Why cut your throat—and for what? It's done everywhere. Where the devil d'you think a shipmaster's going to land if he don't stand in with the owners? Why, the game's as old as the hills."

"I know it is," growled the old man, "but I'll have none of it."

"Come, cap'n," pursued Mr. Harper, "I can quite understand your indignation. Does you credit. But business is business. Now look here, I'll make a definite guarantee. Verbal, of course. I can't possibly give it in writing, now could I?" He grinned cunningly. "You shall have five per cent. with a minimum of a cool thousand as well as the new command. Now that's fair enough."

The old man's eyelids were twitching violently and the gnarled hand he raised to point to the door trembled.

"Mr. Harper, get through that door and down my gangway just as quick as you can move before I have you put off. You know the law of the sea and I'm in command until we reach a home port. Get out!"

"This is monstrous!" exclaimed Mr. Harper angrily. "On my own ship, too. By ——, I'll make you suffer for this. I'll——" The movement of the stocky shoulders around the table caused him to conclude the sentence outside the chart-room. "I'll see you never get a ship in the United Kingdom again, —— you!"

"You'll do what the devil you please!" roared the old man, standing with one foot over the chart-room step. "But you'll do it off this ship! And now go! Or I'll have the mate put you off."

For a second Mr. Harper hesitated, then with an effort controlled himself.

"Very good, Cap'n Tristtam!" he snapped and walked sharply to the bridge steps.

As the captain turned his head to enter the chart-room for his cap, he saw the pallid steward leap from somewhere behind the deck-house and disappear in the wake of the owner, but he was too angry to notice the action. On the maindeck Saunders, the steward, overtook Mr. Harper as he stood waiting for the launch to come alongside.

"'Scuse me, sir," said he, sidling up, "but I sort o' 'eard wot was on. Wot's it worth if I fix it?"

Mr. Harper wheeled, stared at the man sharply, looked around, hesitated and replied—

"D'you know what to do?"

"You bet yer life! 'Ow much is it worth?"

"Five hundred."

"I'll do it. Give me yer word it's orl right, sir?"

"Yes. What's your name?"

"Saunders, sir. 'Enery Saunders."

"All right. Come to the office and ask for me, Mr. Harper, Jr.—when you've fixed it. But nothing if you don't."

"You bet!"

The man's watery eyes gleamed. He slunk away as the captain bawled for the mate from the upper bridge.

"And don't funk it," added Mr. Harper as he climbed over the bulwark on to the rope ladder, glancing up malevolently at the captain, "and I'll fix the blooming ——"

II

THE S. S. *Coronet* certainly looked a "dirty old tramp," as her precious owner had called her, although it was not her fault. Thirty years previously she had been considered a well-found ocean freighter of eighteen hundred tons net, register A1 at Lloyds. And for those thirty years had she tramped the seas in every direction and clime, sailing under apparently a special hand of Providence, for she

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had never met with mishap, not even a collison; and for two decades she had kept up her appearance, in spite of keen competition, as jealously as an ageing woman, until she fell into the hands of Owens & Harper.

After that a succession of skippers, mates and engineers had, according to orders, worked her as hardly and as meanly as boarding-house help. Again the owner was right in his contention that she ate up coal in comparison to modern furnaces. And also in the statement that her lines were wrong for carrying capacity; but then, in those days the influence of seamanship had not entirely waned.

She was an excellent seaboat, not built after the model of a tin cracker-box; but when the modern freighter would be rolling her scuppers under and making such a fuss that hatches had to be battened down, the old *Coronet* would ride past her like a seagull and as dry as one.

However, these facts did not serve much to comfort her captain as he sat in the chartroom, smoking and staring moodily at the Tarifa light.

There was something kin, too, in the history as well as the looks of the *Coronet* and her skipper. The old man looked weather-beaten and uncared for; rather as if his engines, too, were going to pieces for need of repair. Forty years at sea is a long spell. He felt that he should by this time be entitled to a rest, dreaming, as most sailors dream, of a cottage and quietude in the countryside.

He had been married just after his first command, an Australian clipper. These had been happy days and he a trifle careless of the future, for when most of his contemporaries were "going into steam," he obstinately would not admit any good in these "dirty new-fangled machines." This action was typical, the reason of his non-success in life. His integrity was beyond dispute, but he had that stubborn trait in his character which inevitably blinded him to every opportunity of pecuniary advancement.

Other skippers might and did take their perquisites which every owner looked upon as their custom, but Captain Tristtam held his honor higher than any petty gain.

"I'm a master mariner, sir," he said once to a colleague who remonstrated with him, "not a ship chandler."

In time, at the instigation of his wife and the growing needs of two children, he did bend so far as to accept an appointment in steam, an act which he ever secretly despised in himself. "—— sooty steam-kettle!" were his favorite epithets, with a rider to the effect that there were no sailors nowadays—just dock-hands.

Naturally these flaws of excessive virtue retarded the old man's advancement; commercial instinct, ever on the increase, produced firms and agents who became irritated with what they considered high-falutin' nonsense and made representations to his owners, which, of course, had the effect of passing on new commands to other men more pliable.

Even when, through a stroke of luck, a ship-owner, hearing of his world-wide reputation for scrupulous integrity, offered him a passenger command, not even his wife could induce him to accept it, because he would never be permitted to take her along with him. So for twenty years the old man had furrowed the seas in his "steam plow," contented in his unambitious way.

Then his wife died, leaving him with the two girls at school. The loss nearly killed the old man. Perhaps that native stubborness saved him, that and the presence of the children. The close intimacy of so many years together, loving prisoners in a vessel's length, made the loss irreparable.

Afterward the ship indeed seemed a vault echoing with his lonely steps. He had always been a religious man, but not in an aggressive way. Hundreds were the evenings spent in singing hymns to the accompaniment of the yachting piano he had installed in the saloon for her. And now he sought the only consolation that occurred to him.

He would sit reading the Bible and staring at the shadows in the cabin. Always he tried to repeat bravely like a child:

"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be—b-blessed be the n-name of the Lord!"

But often he would break down and sob.

He became, as his officers said, "cranky." Taciturn and irritable, he would spend whole nights pacing the upper bridge without speaking more than a monosyllable, and getting on the nerves of the officer of the watch until the latter hated him.

But after a few years Captain Tristtam began, with permisssion of the owners, to take one, and sometimes both, of his girls

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sea with him. Soon he became normal gain, bestowing all the balked affection on them.

THERE had come two more trials in quick succession. His younger daughter had died of typhoid caught a Mediterranean port, and the firm had iled.

Now, master mariners in Great Britain re as common as seagulls at a harbor outh; legion are the mates, aye, and sec- nd mates with extra-master certificates.

As Mr. Harper had implied, scarcely a rm ever gave a command without the aster investigating at least a thousand ounds in the ship or company. Captain ristam at the time of that firm's failure st the only capital he had ever possessed; or every cent of his wages had been eagerly pent upon the education of his daughters.

For four months he hung about living, on oose cash, and had at last perforce to accept a mate's job. Fortunately his surviving laughter had left school and had gained a eacher's position at a girls' school in Clifton, ear Bristol. Since then the old man's nly desire had been to make enough to yield a tiny income sufficient to take a cottage near the Avon, in which to spend his last years near his beloved Gwendolen.

But now there seemed nothing but the devilish hard life of the mate who carries practically the whole work of the ship. Two years he had of that; grinding slavery for a man of his years, a master mariner, autocrat of his tiny floating world. Then through the superintendent of his late firm, who had secured another job, Captain Tristtam had been offered this berth with Owens & Harper.

Naturally he had "jumped" at the offer. Small as the wages were, mean as the reputation of the firm was, what else could he do? At least he had a command again, although chances of ever making enough to win the small competence were as remote as ever.

A short foretaste of his earthly heaven he had experienced in one short week in a cottage with Gwendolen during her holidays; and then to dirty, sooty Cardiff to take his new command. When a Welshman is mean he can give men whose parents were Scotch-Jew and Levantine-Greek lessons every twenty-four hours of the day. Such were Owens & Harper.

The mate was an old man, too, with an extra-master's certificate, whose weakness was whisky, and he was therefore cheap; the chief engineer had been chief of a large passenger-boat, but a chronic inability to remember whether his ship sailed or not, once he had reached certain sordid delights provided for fool seamen, reduced the price of his services. However, he was an excellent engineer and took the proverbial pride in his charges—that is, when he was cooped up with them.

The flour was full of weevils. The firm seemed to consider that she ought to be painted with cheap red lead from the trucks to the keel, except that fortunately barnacles did not require paint.

Had it not been for the kind services of a friend who heaved the chief aboard at the dock gates, they would have started the voyage without a chief engineer at all. This wouldn't have worried Messrs. Owens and Harper in the least, as they had complied with the law by engaging one.

GRIMED in coal dust from forecastle head to the spare steering-gear box, they plunkety-plinked like a wounded turtle out into the green seas of the Bristol Channel. Yet the "old man" felt the seaman's thrill of joy at the inimitable motion of a thorough seaboat. So the old *Coronet* had thumped her way to Ancona with coal and then up the Dardanelles and Black Sea to Galatz, on the Danube, for grain.

What a boat to command! Yet he had written letters of eulogy to Gwendolen, trying hard to ignore the despondency which possessed him, stifling the gnawing hope of the cottage near to her. After all, he constantly told himself in the long promenades up and down the deck, it was a command again.

And now!

"Blessed be the name of the Lord!" he muttered as he stared with eyes grown suddenly misty.

But those words were hard to say, —— hard, as he muttered in a momentary fit of rebellion.

A desire to escape the painful realization of what awaited him upon arrival home recalled his duties. An automatic glance at the check compass, suspended from the roof of the chart-room so the commander might correct the course without climbing

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to the bridge in rough weather, drove him out into the night and on to the upper bridge.

Above the lame pounding of the engines came the rhythmic slap of the seas on the bow, which, to a sailor's ear, contained an element suggesting a rising sea. Immediately below was the faint glow of the furnace through the fiddley, from whence came the occasional clank of iron. Above the huge black cylinder of the funnel rose the taper mainmast, swaying slightly against a few stars peeping through a light rack of scurrying clouds.

The sepia of the sea held ghostly will-o'-the-wisps around the pallid wake. Far astern the light of Tarifa Point winked, as if conscious of its message of help to seamen.

"Light dead a'cad, sir!" bawled the look-out on the forecastle.

"Aye, aye!" responded the officer of the watch and picked up the night glasses. "P. and O. liner by the glow," he commented to the old man.

"Aye," growled Captain Tristtam, "she'll be several hours ahead o' time. She's not due for the Rock till daybreak. She's the Calcutta boat."

"Yes," returned the mate enviously, "they run on time like a blinkin' railway train. Were you ever through the Canal, sir?"

"Me? No. Never been East since I came in to these —— steam-kettles." He glanced around the arc of the veiled sky. "Not more'n a breeze," he decided. "But if she clouds up dirty before morning, Mr. Wincoop, haul her out half a point."

"Very good, sir."

"Good night an' God bless you!" growled Captain Tristtam and stumped to the ladder.

"Good night, sir!" answered Wincoop, grinning covertly. "Crazy ole codger," he mumbled to himself, alluding to the old man's invariable benediction, a habit of years.

Then, slinking to the shelter of the dodger, he tipped a flask to his lips.

Aft, where all the old-fashioned ships had their cabins, the old man entered the saloon, which was furnished in maple and walnut with glass handles to the doors. There were ample locker seats and a great table above which, swinging from the cross-beams of the skylight, was suspended a tray of glasses and water-bottles. There were shelves also on which the captain's wife could keep potted plants. The roomy living-quarters of the freighter would have made a modern ship-owner squirm at the loss of valuable cargo space.

At the sound of his footsteps the straw-haired steward slithered on the captain's trail. But the old man roughly bade him begone, saying that he would not require any late supper that night. The man grinned slyly as he shot a questioning glance at the retreating stocky form.

"Bloomin' ole fool!" he muttered contemptuously. "'E don't know nothin'."

Indeed the old man was too despondent and worried to need food. In his private cabin, as roomy in proportion as the saloon, he sat down heavily upon the locker seat and stared rather pathetically at a crude crayon portrait of his late wife. This was in a huge gilt frame which, with photographs of his daughters, was suspended above the big bunk built over a chest of drawers.

He appeared, as he sat there hunched up, as if he were imploring help from the Madonna, like a worn out and weary old man whom life has nearly overpowered. Slowly and reluctantly he rose and from a bookcase took down an old family Bible. But he read slowly, with many halts during which, holding one finger on the sentence, he would peer up at the photographs upon the wall. As solemnly he replaced the tome and stood regarding the framed portrait.

"Gwenny! Oh, Gwenny!" he muttered. "But 'tis hard!"

Kneeling down, he buried his gnarled hands in his gray hair.

III

DAWN broke under a sulky sky, with a northerly green sea throwing odd splashes of foam cheekily across the port bow. No land was in sight. On the starboard beam a large freighter was smudging the rays of the struggling sun with smoke. Mr. Wincoop, idly watching her with binoculars, envied, as ever, the more fortunate officers. His nose, whipped by wind, was red.

Although the pocket flask was empty he was not drunk, but then he was never quite sober. His watch below, for Owens & Harper would pay for only two mates, lest they ruin their constitutions with more

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an four hours continuous sleep, had rely whetted his chronic thirst for more isonous sailor's vodka procured in Galatz. Just after seven bells Saunders, the ward, appeared with a mug of hot coffee, r which Mr. Wincoop was very ready. unders, in his dirty apron, with the wind rting with the strands of straw-hair, ited, fixing his pale eyes on the eastern rizon.

"Ain't no land in sight, mister, is there?" queried.

The mate grunted a reply as he sipped e hot coffee.

"W'en 'l we see land agin?" persisted unders.

"Ought to pick up St. Vincent sometime the dog-watch if she don't freshen up," sponded Mr. Wincoop.

The pale eyes fled from Wincoop to the an at the wheel, alighted on a life-boat nd went out to the horizon again.

"'Ard coast, ain't it, mister? Bloomin' reat rocks, they tell me."

"Yes," said the mate with a gurgled ugh. "Thinking of swimming ashore to et out of this rotten packet? Don't lame you if you do!"

"Me? Oh Lor', no. I can't swim. But hese 'ere boats 're all right, ain't they?" glancing at the life-boat again.

"Guaranteed A1 at Lloyd's—to leak like sieve! Supplies and water-kegs filled n the year 1," said the mate with savage arcasm. "If you don't believe me, ask the owners!"

"Oh, Gawd!" The thin lips of the steward twiched as he gazed suspiciously at the mate. "Oh, yer kidding," he said, but not with conviction. "Anyway, some on 'em 'ud float."

"What's the matter with you? The chief been telling you that the engines 're going to drop outer her?"

The pale blue eyes dodged under the amused ones of the mate to the binnacle.

"No, 'e's too busy singin' 'imself to sleep," retorted Saunders. "But I wouldn't be surprized, I wouldn't. Every blinkin' thing's rotten on this tub. I say, mister, wot's the course now?" added Saunders, peering into the binnacle, around which the canvas cover used in port had been peeled down and left hanging. "Something west-nor'-west, ain't it?"

"Yes," assented Mr. Wincoop; "something like that. Want to be an A. B., eh? Here y'are! You'll be late with the old man's breakfast if you stop here and jaw."

The steward took the empty mug and departed. But instead of going straight along the flying bridge which led from the bridgedeck amidship to the poop, he slipped into the chart-room and pored over the chart which was held open on the table by two heavy rulers.

"West-nor'-west," he muttered, dabbing grimy fingers on the chart.

He followed calculatingly the outline of the coast, curving round from the Straits of Gibraltar gradually to Cape St. Vincent and north to Cape Finisterre, where the land dropped away abruptly into the Bay of Biscay.

"We must be somewhere about 'ere. But I'll see after they've made the noon reckoning." He straightened up and stared speculatively through the porthole. "Gor,' I wonder if 'e's 'aving me? Better slip some grub and water in a case. No more o' this 'ere dog's life." His glance wandered around and was arrested by the check compass. "Oh ——!" he muttered.

After peeping through the porthole and the door, he stepped from the locker seat gingerly on to the table, opened the glass face of the check compass and jerked the card until he had bent the needle. Then he snatched up the mug, skipped out and along the flying bridge to serve the captain's breakfast.

The westerly breeze continued steadily throughout the day under a fairly clear sky. At noon the captain and the mate as usual "took the sun." While in the chart-room working out the position, the mate noticed that the check compass was out of commission. He drew the captain's notice and examined it. Of course such a delicate thing as the needle could not be readjusted by lay hands. However, the matter was not very serious.

Something was always breaking down in the ill-found ship. Coming down the Danube she had nearly been put ashore by the steering-chains' breaking at a critical moment, which, for lack of tools, had to be repaired with wire. Still the old *Coronet* waddled along like a battered old hobo whose clothes and boots are tied together with pieces of string.

Most of the day the old man spent sitting in an inert mass on the locker seat of the

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chart-room, staring gloomily at the white-ribbed sea. Not until night had fallen in the dog-watch did he arouse himself to glance at the barometer and climb to the upper bridge.

"Glass falling, Mr. Wincoop," he commented. "Mebbe we'll get a thorough nor'wester unless the wind shifts."

"Yes, sir," agreed the mate. "Hope she holds rather than the dirt from the sou'-west."

THE mate took a glance over the the bridge ends to assure himself that the side-lights were burning well and, returning, struck one bell. Captain Tristtam went aft to wash his hands for supper. The second mate, a young small Welshman, passed him to take over the watch. Behind him came the relieving steersman.

Then immediately upon his heels slipped from behind the chart-room the slender steward and flitted like a ghost up the ladder. Just on the portside of the binnacle he stood holding up one hand as if staring into the night. On the starboard end the two officers were chatting.

As the relieving man took the wheel and was mumbling a repetition of the course, the steward moved toward the officers, appeared to trip and fell with his body over the binnacle. He clung there for a few moments as if convulsively wrestling with something, obscuring the lighted compass.

"'Ere," remonstrated the steersman, "wot in —— yer doin? Yer ain't no plite-glass winder, are yer?"

The steward recovered swiftly and, limping prodigiously past, muttered something about having broken his adjective knee-cap. At the top of the ladder he shouted to the mate that supper was ready.

"All right," assented the mate, "but it isn't four bells yet."

As the steward disappeared the steering-gear began to clank rustily.

"What the blazes are you doing?" shouted the mate walking over to the binnacle. "Who the —— told you to starboard yer helm?"

"She wuz mor'n two points off her course, sir," responded the man sulkily.

The mate swore as he glanced at the binnacle.

"Blarsted dock-hands, not sailors by ——! Keep an eye on the binnacle, Mr. Crofters," he added to the second mate as he left the bridge; "these —— lubbers keep a course like a drunken ship chandler's tout."

The supper of dry hash and tapioca pudding passed as usual almost in silence.

"More hash, Mr. Wincoop?"

"Please, sir," responds the mate.

"More puddin', Mr. Wincoop?"

"Please, sir."

"Got that No. 1 hold stowed yet, Mr. Wincoop?"

"We ain't got enough hands to shift it."

"Umgh."

"Chips sounded the bilges again, Mr. Wincoop?"

"Yes sir. Twenty-eight inches. Chief running the pumps."

"Umgh. Leaks like a sieve. Have some cheese, Mr. Wincoop?"

"No, thank ye, sir," would answer the mate, eying the soapy shipchandlers mess.

As always, so soon as the mate had bolted his food he would excuse himself on the ground of relieving the second to come to supper and depart muttering—

"Solemn ole codger!"

As soon as he got on deck he saw that the wind had changed. A murky scud of cloud was racing up from the S. W. and already the waves had altered direction.

"That sou'westerly's going to make dirty weather, Mr. Crofters," he remarked as he reached the bridge.

"Yes, sir," responded the second, "but it's a bit more southerly—about sou'sou'west to west-sou-west. But it looks very dirty indeed."

Within half an hour the prophecy of the barometer had been verified. The flying scud turned into a driving drizzle obscuring all the stars; a nasty night in which the swish of the seas and the howl of the wind through stanchions and masts increased to half a gale, adding a good knot to the wallowing old *Coronet's* speed. Muffled in oilskins, Captain Tristtam smoked his pipe in the lee of the port dodger for an hour, deigning a few grunted remarks to the second mate at long intervals. When he clambered down the greasy ladder after his "Good night an' God bless you!" he encountered a dim form on the lower bridge.

"It's only me, sir," whined the steward's voice in answer to his grumbled demand. "Sorta thought I'd get some air, sir. Will yer want anythin', sir?"

"Yes, bring me some cocoa at four bells

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ore I turn in," grumbled the old man and th a seaman's instinctive step found his y along the swaying flying-bridge to the ziness of his cabin aft, where he tried to merse himself in the troubles of *Little rrit* his favorite, instead of his own. Just after one bell, as the mate came rbed with oilskins and flask for the first itch, the same form clung to the bridge-dder rail murmuring—

"'Scuse me, sir, but when'll we be seein' Vincent?"

"We pass it just afore eight bells," swered the mate, mounting the ladder.

"Thank ye, sir!" mumbled the figure aintively and disappeared aft.

Eight bells clanged and were echoed ebly. Hours of the broken rhythm of the gine against the whistle and sob, broken y the clank of distant metal, continued s the old *Coronet* waddled on in humid arkness.

ALONG the flying-bridge came a portly figure clinging desperately to the rail at every heave, slithered long the dripping wooden deck to the star-oard corner of the lower bridge.

Clinging to the stanchion with one skinny and, he pawed with the other at the whirling mist about, eyes staring at a nebulous oid which seemed to whine derisively to he slow reel beneath his feet. Moisture ollected and ran down his neck, yet still he azed until the effort hurt his eyeballs.

"Can't see a bloomin' thing. Lumme, lon't blooming well like it, I don't," muttered Saunders, clutching at the life belt beneath the oilskin. "Blimey," he remarked to himself again, very much later, 'wot's 'appened? Funny! P'r'aps she's running in a bay or something. Didn't see no bay on the chart, though. Orter struck it by now. Cricky, if it ud 'appened w'en I was makin' the cocoa, Gor' blast the——" A bell clanged out resentfully, seeming to cause the elements to whistle in more doleful derision. "Oh crickey, there's one bell!"

Nine bells came, summoning dim figures from the ship's bowels; voices muttered as if respectfully, died and sank in obedience to the chant of the ocean.

He continued to cling to the stanchion, staring desperately until his eyes were agonized. *Whe-e-e-e-w! Clankety-clank! Whe-e-e-e-e-ew!*

"Oh Gor', ain't it dark!"

Dull thuds of the second mate's footfalls above his head seemed like a distant roar of surf on rocks. Whe-e-e-e-ew!

"Oh, ——!" in a whispered scream, "I can't swim! Oh, ——, wot did I do it for!"

Whe-e-e-e-e-e-ew! The steering-gear clanked remotely, mockingly.

Whee-e-e-eew! Suddenly he started convulsively, scrambled and slithered to the bridge ladder, gasping:

"I'll tell 'im! I'll tell 'im! P'r'aps it ain't too late." *Whee-e-e-e-e-ew!* "Oh Gor'!" he whimpered. "But, 'sposin'—'sposin', I do get through! Five 'undred!" He clung indecisively to the rail. "Middle watch, 'e said. Ow! Wy 'e'd see it on the other bow!"

He scuttled around the chart-room to the port corner like a drunken crab and stared at humid vacuity. *Whee-e-e-e-ew!* The spray stung him gleefully.

"Oh Gor', w'ere is it?"

Again he slithered and scrambled back to the portside. *Whee-e-e-e-e-e-ew!* Intently he listened.

"Ow, wy did I! Ow, wy don't it 'appen! Ow!"

Once more he slid around to the port corner, gazed, muttered, swore and prayed. Four strokes of the bell were snatched by the wind.

"Ow!" The cry was swept away as greedily. "That's wot we been an' done! 'E sed we passed it in the dog-watch. We're in a blarsted bay or something."

Followed a few minutes of desperate cogitating. Hesitantly he announced to the void:

"Gor'! Mebbe it ull be three days afore we fetch the other side. Just as well. Five hundred 'ull set me up. It did give me a turn, but it's the chance of me life. Ugh, I'll go and turn in fer a bit o' sleep—but I'll keep me belt on!"

Whee-e-e-e-e-e-w! assented the wind.

IV

NEXT day the wind, which had slackened a little, swept the smoke flat from the top of the swaying, rusty funnel in a swirling stream over the starboard bow against a greasy sky. Ineffectually the old *Coronet* pursued it, seething along as if trying to outrace the spume-headed waves.

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The routine of the ship continued as lifeless as ever. Bells clanged the melancholy passage of the hours.

Twice sister tramps surged past on the starboard beam, crashing their bluff bows into the seas; and just after eight bells, when the mate, sextant in hand, was hoping for an opening in the rack for a glimpse of the sun, a two-funnel mailboat, outward bound, drew a puzzled frown to Mr. Wincoop's brow as he watched her through the binoculars.

"She's North German Lloyd all right, sir," he commented to the captain, "but what the devil's she making a course for the Azores for?"

In the first dog-watch the steward, who had found a prodigious amount of work to do around the chart-room all the morning, asked Mr. Wincoop when they should see Finistere.

"Tonight."

"And 'ow long across the bay, sir?"

"Two days, if this wind holds good and pushes the old tub along."

The wind did hold and with it the flying gray scud obscuring the sun as effectually as a London fog. That evening, when by dead reckoning they should be off Cape Finistere, the course was altered northwesterly. On the second morning, just after seven bells, the sun, struggling bravely, did succeed in revealing a wan face for a few moments.

The mate scurried down to the chart-room for his sextant, but by the time he had reached the bridge again the ray of pallid primrose had vanished.

During the night, too, the scud was as persistent, never permitting even a snap reckoning from the North star. So it was that the daily run had to be roughly calculated from the course and the log mileage. On the fourth day the wind and sea dropped a little more.

A fairly heavy swell was striking her on the port quarter, each one of which swung her tail almost out of water. The wriggling motion to the pitch and roll, as the propeller threatened to race in anger, afforded an excuse for much detailed profanity on the part of the chief engineer, who had every cause to fear disaster at any extra demand upon his rackety charges.

"Funny, sir," remarked the mate to the skipper as the light slowly waned that evening; "we might be in the middle of the Atlantic from all the shipping we see."

"Umgh," agreed Captain Tristtam. "'Tis queer." And after a pause, "Haul her out a half-point, Mr. Wincoop."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Mebbe we haven't allowed enough for an easterly setting. Don't like this dead reckoning, Mr. Wincoop."

"Nor I, sir. Anyway, we ought to pick up Ushant tonight, sir."

"Yes, yes," growled the old man. "Ought to pick it up now if our reckoning's right and if only that —— dirt would clear away. What the mischief d'you want?" he demanded abruptly of the steward beside him.

"The 'doctor' (cook)" said he glibly, "wants ter know, sir, if yer'd like wet 'ash ternight instead of dry 'ash?"

"Wet hash! What's the matter with you, man? Are you drunk?"

"No, sir, no. The doctor 'e——"

"Tell the doctor to go to the devil, and you, too," exclaimed Captain Tristtam irritably. "Confounded dock-scourings!" he muttered wrathily as the steward hastily retreated.

"As if it wasn't wet twice a week, dry twice a week and salt horse three times a week with duff on Sundays. What's come over these confounded galley lubbers!"

"Glass going up, sir," remarked the mate, picking up the binoculars to hide a covert grin. "Mebbe we'll get a sight of the sun tomorrow."

"Mebbe. Mebbe."

THE dog-watches passed and the mate came on the bridge for the first watch. Still there was no promise of stars. The night was gray-black. The sea had died, but the swell heaved the old *Coronet* along with the screwing motion, making hissing, seething waves around her bows as if impatient at being compelled to be burdened with such a disgraceful old tank. At four bells the bluff form of the captain appeared on the bridge. He stared at the binnacle and demanded of the mate a trifle irritably—

"Haven't you picked up Ushant yet, Mr. Wincoop?"

"No, sir. Can't understand it. Ought to be a glare, even if we're out a good way."

Captain Tristtam took out his own night glasses from their special case fastened on

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the bridge rail and searched the horizon ahead steadily for ten minutes.

"Don't like it," he muttered. "And what's more, can't understand it."

"Nor I, sir," agreed the mate. "What worries me, sir," he added diffidently, "is that we've seen so little traffic these three days. Rummy, I think."

"Can't be such a westerly setting as all that unless the currents have all gone wrong. Impossible. Impossible."

"Yes, sir. And if we've set east we ought to be within the Bordeaux traffic."

The captain wheeled at a shadow across the binnacle.

"Will you be wanting your cocoa ——" began the steward.

"Of course I do, confound you!"

"I only wanted ter ask, sir——"

"Go to the devil and get off this bridge," roared the old man, thoroughly incensed. "What's come over the fool?" he muttered, turning away. "The man fairly haunts me."

Both the captain and the mate became absorbed in searching that vague line where the sullen sky blended with the sea.

"No, no," decided Captain Tristtam at length, "we can't be inside the Bay. You pulled her out half a point, didn't you, Mr. Wincoop?"

"Yes, sir."

"Strange, devilish strange," he growled, sweeping his glass; "we're as deserted as the arctic circle. I'm just going to get a bite, Mr. Wincoop, and I'll come back."

"Very good, sir."

The old man stumped aft angrily. Never in all his long seafaring life had he been so completely in doubt as to his position. Under the swinging lamp of the saloon the table was empty.

"Stew-ard!" he roared angrily. "Where's that cocoa, confound you?"

"Coming, sir, coming," cried Saunders and appeared with a mug of cocoa in a sloppy saucer.

"Confound you," growled the old man, "what the mischief d'you mean by bringing me such a mess as that?"

"Don't pay no walet's wages 'ere," retorted the steward, sidling toward the saloon door.

"What did you say?" demanded Captain Tristtam, swinging around in his swivel chair. "Come here! What did you say?" The steward stopped in the doorway. "And what the devil 're you trussed up like that for?" he continued, staring at the steward's unusual bulk.

"Ain't trussed up," mumbled the steward, intimidated. "Ain't I got me rights to git some hair if I wants it? 'Sides, I ain't sich a fool as some people I knows on."

And with that cryptic remark he closed the door behind him, leaving the old man staring perplexedly.

"God bless my soul," he grumbled to himself as he sipped his cocoa, "I'm getting old and worn out. Even these dock-scourings laugh at me. Oh, Gwenny, Gwenny!"

As he came forward again half an hour later he did not observe the same bulky figure huddled up in the starboard corner of the lower bridge.

"Gor'!" muttered Saunders, watching the stocky figure mount the upper bridge. "Ole man seems sorter ratty! Wot's 'e doin' up there?" A sighing whistle escaped him. "Lumme," he whispered apprehensively to the gently seething sea, "'ope' e ain't smelled a rat." He stared anxiously at the horizon through a pair of binoculars "borrowed" from the second mate. "Blimey, I can't see nothin' neither. Orter 'ear somethin' if yer lookin' for it," he muttered again. "This 'ere swell orter make a 'ell of a smother. Rummy!" Yet he shuddered and glanced over his shoulder at the dim mass of the life-boat. "Ow! I don't like, I don't. Still five hundred 'ud set me up fer life. Oh Gor'! Wot's that?"

But "that" was merely the heavy footfalls of the mate, moving on the bridge above his head. The night appeared to grow even denser in the nebulous blackness. The deck heaved as the swell lifted the *Coronet* forward, the engines thumped lamely and the seething of the waves from her bows as she slid down the opposite hill of water seemed like techy sighs. Ever and again the steering-gear muttered complainingly as if carrying on a desultory conversation with the desultory clank of iron from the fiddley away beneath.

The heavy footfalls above his head passed to and fro regularly. One bell rang out and was repeated solemnly. Vague voices muttered. Yellow gleamed and disappeared in the blackness of the forecastle.

Feet slapped on deck and a laugh of some fireman crossing the fore maindeck on his way to the stokehold sounded sardonic.

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Eight bells clanged. The relieving watch departed eagerly for their spell below. Again the nocturnal psalm of a ship at sea carried on monotonously.

THE steward noted with blasphemous irritation that the captain had not left the bridge.

"Ole fool!" he muttered contemptuously. "Bloomin' ole fool! Let 'im wite there if 'e wants, 'ang 'im!"

His feet became cold, but he dared not walk up and down for fear of attracting attention.

He rocked like a caged bear, staring this way and that until his agonized eyes refused to see. Four bells came, and at last, after what seemed interminable waiting, eight bells once more. Four o'clock in the morning and yet nothing had happened; nor was there a sign audible or visible, only the wriggly heave a little slower, the seething sighs, the mutter of the rudder chains against the broken rhythm of the engines.

Minutes spent anxiously trying to stare at infinity upon the port side were abandoned to scuttle in a sudden panic back to the starboard corner. The steward could not imagine what had happened. The flogging of his cupidity to stand the strain of expecting a grinding crash and the effort to smother the pangs of terror at what might happen afterward had reduced his blasphemy to whimpers.

Nervous clutches at the life belt beneath the coat were varied by furtive skips to the life-boat to fumble again at the ready loosened falls. Four bells at six o'clock seemed to ring out with an intimidating laughter. A little after, the density of the blackness began just appreciatively to become less dense.

Very gradually the foremast and the vague shape of the forecastle head began to show foggily like a negative in a developing dish. On the nebulous expanse of the sea grew slowly a misty pale light revealing reluctantly the individuality of one roller from another; the intensity of each sighing bow wave grew from luminosity to the recognizable smother of foam.

By seven bells the morning was come, revealing to the steward neither ship nor land nor anything save an inexorable expanse of gray-green rollers, fleeing in interminable numbers into the infinity of the pallid fog of sunrise.

V

IN THE bloodshot eyes of Saunders, as he lurched from the galley with hot coffee for the mate and captain, was the scared look of an albino ape. As he stood waiting for the empty mugs, he fidgeted uneasily near the binnacle, staring incredulously at the waste of waters and glancing suspiciously at the two officers, as if he suspected they knew something, something that he dared not ask.

"Yes, sir," he heard Mr. Wincoop remark, "it's the rummiest go I've ever struck. I think we must have made an error somewhere in the westerly setting. If that's the case we should pick up the Lizard tonight."

"Umgh!" grunted the old man, gazing at the sky rack in the east. "Mebbe she'll clear afore noon."

"Yes, sir. The wind's dropping anyway. Looks like shifting to the east, which'll clear away this dirt."

At the mention of the Lizard Light the steward gazed ahead expectantly, as if he expected Lands End to jump out of the mist under the ship's bows; at the suggestion of an observation at noon he shot a glance at the two officers and, opening his coat, leaned negligently against the rail on the port side of the binnacle, so that the flap of his coat half-enveloped the compass.

In that position he remained for a few seconds, staring as if he could see something over the starboard side of the ship. He appeared to be scratching himself.

"Gor!" he commented for the benefit of the steersman as he straightened up. "Thort I saw a blooming whale!"

"You vass see vot?"

The blue eyes of the man stared at him uncomprehendingly.

"Saw yer fat awnt, yer bloody square 'ead," snapped the steward in tones of relief.

As he moved past the man to take the empty mugs from the officers, one side of his overcoat sagged.

At one bell Captain Tristtam resumed his interminable promenade of the length of the bridge, but a glance at the compass brought forth a bellow.

"What the devil's this, Mr. Wincoop?"

"Sir!"

"What course did I give you?"

"North by east, a half-north, sir," responded the mate instantly.

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"Well, what the devil's this man doing? North by west, a half-west. Port your helm, confound you!"

The man, staring, obeyed and to the mate's brisk reprimand stolidly replied—

"I bane keep him joost same oder man he left, sir."

"Confounded dock-scourings! They can't even speak English," grumbled Captain Tristtam.

But as he turned he slipped so that he had to clutch at a stanchion to save himself.

"Mr. Wincoop, why the devil can't you keep this bridge clean?"

"Clean, sir?"

"Clean, I said!" snorted the old man, kicking some object on the deck. "Putty lying all over the place, confound it."

The mate came over and inspected several broken lumps of putty.

"The glass of the starboard side-light's loose. I suppose Chips must ha' been stiffening it up. I'll see to it, sir."

Captain Tristtam grunted disgustedly. Saunders, beneath the bridge where he had been listening intently, sighed heavily.

"Gor' lumme," he commented, "the ole man ain't got on to it! But westerly 'e sed. Wy, the old tubs bin running out ter sea instead of on the rocks! Jiminy cripes, I must 'a' bin and gawn and put the bleeding thing on the wrong side." And, with a spit of disgust at his own stupidity, he flung a circular slip of iron into the sea.

However, he need not have been so anxious to recover the incriminating evidence, for although the wind dropped the masking haze hung obstinately throughout the day. Greasy twilight settled like a tired bird upon the sluggish roll of the sea. But during the second dog-watch, when the captain and mate were at supper, came a cry from the forecastle lookout—

"Light on the port bow, sir!"

"Aye, aye," acknowledged Mr. Crofters. "Must be the Lizard at last," he muttered as he picked up the light with his night glasses.

After a prolonged stare he lowered the binoculars, plucked at his whistle and sent a shrill summons.

"Go aft and call the cap'n," he ordered the seaman and waltzed joyfully up to the binnacle to take the bearings of the new light.

"What the devil's the matter, Mr. Crofters?" demanded Captain Tristtam sharply.

"The Lizard?"

"No, sir. Looks like a big freighter. Out there half a point to port, sir. Three red perpendicular."

"What?"

Captain Tristtam almost snatched at the glasses, for three red lights perpendicular, being interpreted, means: Ship out of control; help needed—the apogee of a mariner's hopes. For such a signal usually implies salvage with a consequent bonus, according to the value of the prize, to each and every member of the crew of the fortunate ship.

"By heavens that's right, praise be to God!" confirmed the old man and, beckoning with his left hand, gave the command: "Starboard your helm half a point!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Even in the clank of chains there seemed a thanksgiving note. Three-quarters of an hour later the old *Coronet* wallowed lazily on the sulky swell astern of a big freighter upon which every man aboard was hungrily gazing.

After a short exchange of bellows through the speaking trumpet, eager if clumsy, hands tore off the rotten canvas cover and wrenched at the rusty davits and fall-blocks of the starboard life-boat which the steward had so thoughtfully provisioned.

Down she sank, creaking and complaining, and down the falls swarmed the crew in charge of the mate. Leak she did as he had foretold, but what did that matter on such an errand? One man was set to bailing and away they went, giving a disgraceful exhibition of handling a boat by the British Mercantile Marine.

But even that was lost upon the captain of the old school as he stood on the bridge, feasting his eyes on the square lines of the great freighter; for to him, should he get a tow, a commander's share would be enough to realize that modest dream that was left to him; already he heard his daughter Gwenny calling delightedly to him as she came through the tiny garden of a tinier cottage on the Avon.

Hours, it seemed, the old *Coronet* lay coyly snuggled in the trough of the greasy swell, like a ragged duck glad to hide her defects from this enormous drake of a ship. But at length came the clank and irregular splash of oars as the life-boat returned, dragging behind her a light line with which

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to haul aboard a steel hawser from the freighter.

"Well?"

The old man's voice was hoarse with anxiety as the mate mounted the bridge to report.

"The Green Star *Brian Boru*, sir. Halifax to Rotterdam. General cargo. Twelve-thousand-tonner. My God, sir! Broke her tail-end shaft and lost her propeller! Wants a tow. Usual terms. Queenstown."

"Queenstown!" exclaimed Captain Tristtam, a note of despair in his voice. "But good heavens, we can't tow her all round the British Isles. Why on earth didn't you make it the nearest port, say Plymouth?"

"That's it! That's it!" exclaimed the mate with an exultant whoop. "Queenstown is the nearest port. God only knows how we got here, and just now, I don't care how it happened, but we're about a hundred miles south of the Fastnet Rock Lighthouse off the southwest coast of Ireland."

"What!" Captain Tristtam grunted inarticulately. "B-but impossible! Why—why——"

He stared incredulously at the large bulk of the freighter as if he expected her to evaporate.

"Why, it's—it's a miracle!"

Then his gray head drooped as he muttered:

"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord! Oh, Gwenny!"

THE WATCHERS

by Berton Braley

THE trains go roaring past by day and flashing by at night,
Bearing adventurers of trade or seekers of delight,
While from the little houses that front the right of way
There gaze the folk whom destiny has planted there to stay.
And some are wistful, wondering how it would seem to be
Click-clicking over shining rails, of every fetter free.
They thrill with dreaming vision of towns and fields afar
Which come to those who flicker past upon a Pullman car.

Yet most of those who watch the trains are scarcely stirred at all;
For them these magic chariots have neither spell nor thrall;
Their passage only serves to break the round of things and then
Dull-eyed the watchers go about their humdrum life again.
No longing leaps within their breasts, no envy fills their glance;
They never see in rushing trains the lure of high romance,
They only mutter, "She's on time" or "She's a little late,"
While great adventure thunders past their very door-yard gate!

Oh sad it is for watchers who are wistful as they gaze
On many-windowed caravans that sweep down metaled ways,
Yet though they never take that trail the dream is theirs to hold,
The thought to nurse and cherish and the vision to unfold.
But for the other watchers, the dull phlegmatic kind,
Theirs is the greater tragedy, for they are wholly blind,
And what could be so sad as they whose lives are bleak and slow
Who never knew the world is wide—and do not want to know!

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INDIAN FANATICISM

A BIT OF THE OLD WEST

by E. A. Brininstool

Author of "Tom Smith," etc.

ONE of the most remarkable episodes in the history of Indian fanaticism occurred in October, 1890, on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Agency, which is situated south of the Yellowstone River, Montana, and along the banks of the Rosebud and Tongue Rivers.

Some trouble had been brewing between the whites and Indians in that section, and finally a young rancher named Boyle was murdered by two young Cheyenne warriors on September sixth, within three miles of the camp of the First United States Cavalry. The body was hidden away in a deep ravine and was only discovered after a three-days' search by the troops, assisted by friendly Indians. Upon the finding of the body the two young Cheyennes had taken to the hills.

The cavalry were at once dispatched on their trail and the pursuit continued several days without success. Finally the young braves grew tired of dodging the troops and through the father of one of the youthful warriors intimated to the Indian Agent that they wanted to die in a fair fight. They declared that if the troops would all assemble at a certain spot they would ride forward and fight the entire force until shot to death, as they realized their brutal murder meant the forfeiture of both their lives.

Major Carroll, commander of the troops, was notified and the cavalry was ordered to saddle up. It was at first looked upon as a huge joke, for the idea of two young Indians fighting three troops of cavalry seemed preposterous and out of reason. It was a challenge such as had never before been flung down and it was the general belief that the young bucks would not appear.

However, Brave Wolf, one of the leading Cheyenne chiefs, declared there need be no fear on the part of the troops that the

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young Cheyennes would fail to stand by their challenge. They would promptly come forth, he stated, and the fight would be one to the finish.

The troops left the agency, turning up a road east of that point, where the chief had been informed the two youthful warriors would make their appearance. Half a mile from the agency the troops were posted, some mounted and others on foot. The scene of the proposed unequal contest was in a narrow valley enclosed on all sides by rocky hills. It was a perfect amphitheater.

Assembled along these hills was the entire Cheyenne tribe in all the barbaric splendor of savage trappings, eager to have the white man see how an Indian could die in battle. The two braves had sent a special invitation to their people to all be present, and here they were—old men, warriors, squaws and papooses—waiting for the curtain to rise and the act to begin.

There was no lengthy waiting, however. Scarcely had spectators and troops disposed themselves to vantage-points when there appeared from a clump of timber several hundred yards distant two mounted figures that were immediately recognized as the young Cheyennes. They were in full war-regalia, armed to the teeth and ready for business.

Gallantly they rushed their ponies to one of the steepest heights overlooking the entire valley, and here, with the eagle feathers of their war-bonnets nodding in the breeze, they chanted the Cheyenne death-dirge. They knew that hundreds of pairs of eyes of their tribesmen were upon them and they scorned to show the slightest trace of fear. They were warriors, although but little more than mere boys, and they would show the assemblage how bravely the son of a Cheyenne could die.

With the conclusion of the death-song the two braves faced about and opened fire with their Winchesters upon the troops in view. Scores of carbines responded and soon the young Cheyennes were driven from their rocky height. They immediately charged straight down the steep hillside directly toward one of the troops of cavalry that had deployed near the spot where the greater portion of the Cheyenne tribe were assembled. They evidently realized that the battle would be short and they desired their friends and relatives to be near the place of death.

In the charge across the valley, the pony of one of the braves was shot down, putting its rider afoot. The other Cheyenne charged straight at the line of troops, firing his rifle rapidly in response to the spitting carbines. Through a perfect hail of bullets he rode, until he had actually pierced the line of troopers. Then he fell, riddled with bullets.

The dismounted Indian, with a storm of lead about him, turned down the valley. His clothing was perforated in many places. Finally he sought refuge in the bed of a dry stream, where he fought with a bravery and valor which could not but excite the admiration of the troops. Soon he, too, was pierced by many bullets.

The Indian mothers of both youths, who, it was subsequently learned, had gone into the hills in early morn and decorated their sons for battle, now rushed forward and threw themselves upon the bodies, filling the air with their wails and lamentations, interspersed with songs of praise for the valor of their beloved dead. The tragedy was over.

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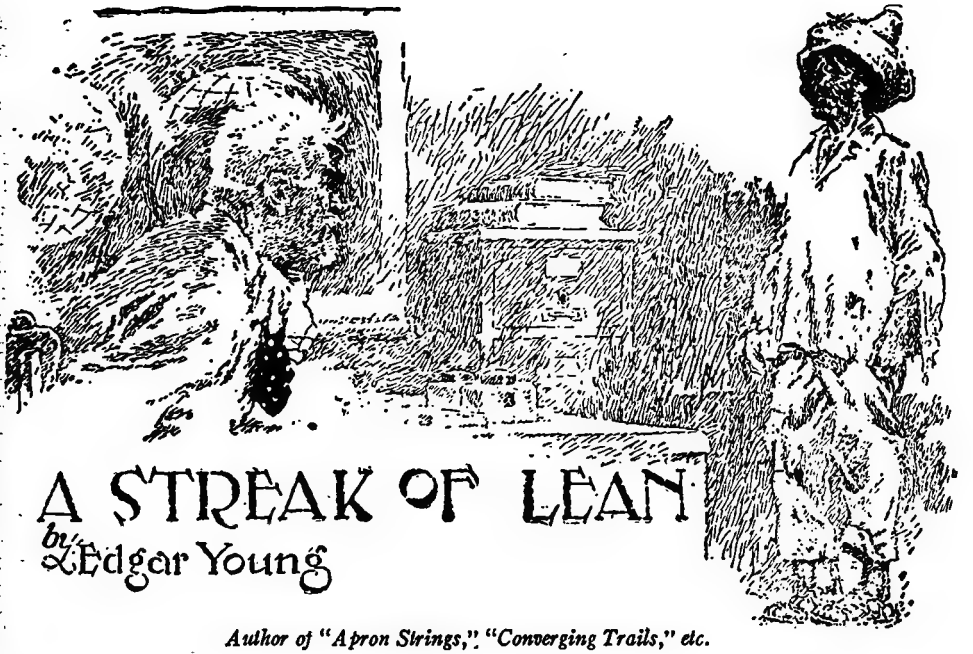

A STREAK OF LEAN

by Edgar Young

Author of "Apron Strings," "Converging Trails," etc.

"CHIMBORAZO" HARMON was raging. The tropics had got the upper hand of him. He was left alone and the G. and A. was shut down. He paced up and down his office floor, pausing now and then to rumble forth deep curses against the tropics and all things tropical. His mop of iron-gray hair had been touseled until it arose from his head like the mane of some angry animal. Chimborazo was in eruption. But there was no one near to see and appreciate his wrath. And he was very much in earnest.

The big office clock showed it to be a quarter to two. The thermometer just beneath it marked a 111 degrees of heat. The humidity was suffocating. Just outside the window on the platform of the depot lay the dead bodies of sixty odd "Barefoots."

Over a hundred had lain down to sleep there the night before. In the empty box cars throughout the yard were other bloated-faced corpses, just how many no one knew nor cared. There had been a multitude of them floating up and down with the tide, for days on end, in the murky Guayas just off the end of the rickety wharf which marked the terminus of the G. and A., or *Gran Ferrocarril Guayaran al Andes*. Others lay like dead rats at the water's edge, where they had crawled to fill their burning stomachs with the foul black river fluid. Carrion *zopilotes*, gorged to bursting with reeking human flesh, sat drowsing in the narrow streets or perched on the grass roofs of the low 'dobe huts of the native pueblo across the track. Death had walked about big in Guayaran, *el sepulcro*, "the graveyard of South America." "Yellow Jack" had taken the non-immune Quichuas, drafted from their villages in the high plains and sent down by the powers that happened to be in control at Alto like flies before a hot blast.

The rats had grown fat and brought forth broods in abundance, for hungry rats will not breed, and the bubonic had ridden about from door to door on the fleas their mangy backs served for a nesting-place. And the survivors of the plagues fought hand-to-hand conflicts with rifle and bayonet in the streets and on the railroad track and, mired to their necks in the festering swamps back of town, hacked each other to pieces with keen-edged *machetes*, snakes and crocodiles taking sides as the occasion presented.

Human life was cheaper than a handful of dried cacao beans. The revolutionists, assisted by the plagues and insects, had defeated those that had been sent against them, and there was a temporary lull in operations until the Federals could conscript other Indians to send down.

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Harmon paused to mop his face. He gasped for breath. There was a suggestion of a sob in his voice as he began addressing a tirade to the emptiness.

"Pure and simple——I call it! Not a wheel turning and every —— white-livered tramp railroader gone. Wish I'd had a bunch of Yaqui Indians. They'd have stuck. Here I've been a-babying my bunch along, thinking they'd hang to me when things come bad. I'd ought to have run 'em off the first pay-day. Men? Wasn't a man among them. I took chin-music for nerve. Must be getting soft-headed that I can't judge men any more. I'll be eternally —— if I don't make the next bunch show me. I'll ride 'em and pop the whip over 'em until I find out who's Jake. Next time? ——! It looks like there ain't going to be a next time. Looks like things have got me down and a-stomping the lights out of me. This is the worst yet."

Harmon glared around the room. Seeing nothing to vent his rage upon, he dropped into his chair. He sat silent for a moment, then burst into further speech.

"Eight years. Quite a spell. I thought I could make it pay. I will yet, maybe. The building of it turned my head white. It's been fight, fight, fight, from the first day. I've been in a corner like a boar every minute since I landed. Yellow Jack and bubonic killed my laborers like rabbits. Alligators and snakes swallowed 'em in the swamps. Centipedes and insects stung and bit and slaughtered 'em in the camps. They had sieges of dysentery, smallpox and wart fever. Every man was rotten with malaria and tropical sores. One whole camp had leprosy. Guess they had every disease that was ever heard of. I had my part of them, too. Men went down out of sight in the mud if they stumbled off the right o' way anywhere from here to Alise, at the foot of the Andes; then after we got to building in the mountains they got blown up in explosions, fell off of cliffs and got buried under avalanches. A man for every cross-tie! ——, it cost one for every spike!

"And when I get it built, what do I get? Promoted! Pay raised to fifteen hundred a month! —— them, didn't I do enough when I built it? No, they must saddle the operating end on to me. Said I could make it pay. Pay? It won't pay. I've been giving it all I've got. I get it up to about the paying stage and then it falls down. —— a-popping all the time! Tropical rains flooded and washed away the track. Bottom fell out of the corduroy and cinder fills and it sank. Where's those four sections of track in Black Swamp? No bottom to that place. I know a telegraph pole that's made up of sixteen lengths of rail bolted together. Top of it just three feet out of the water now.

"And the mountains. Sure has been one fight up in there. Volcanoes buried the line out of sight with lava and ashes and set fire to the trestles; rocks have come down that weighed a hundred tons and wedged up the cuts; earthquakes have shook our bridges to pieces; whole mountains have begun sliding; that place above Devil's Nose has slid from the first day—she's twenty mile square, that slide. And up there on the plateau. Typhus and *verugas* when we were building and sand-dunes ever since, sand-hills a hundred feet high traveling along with the wind and burying everything in sight. And now? Every mother's son of a Yellow Belly up in arms and banging away with a rusty old Mauser at the next one. And my bunch of rough-and-ready yard-office wind-jammers and office pen-pushers flying like scared rabbits for Panama and home!"

HARMON ceased speaking and sat very quiet. Then he reached in his desk and drew out a pad of paper and began planning how to proceed. He was an old man so far as age was concerned. But he was an old fighter, a grizzly old battle-scarred veteran of many battles. He was one of the kind that go down to death fighting, struggling, looking back; one in whom quit or give-up does not exist. The tropics had licked him this time, it is true, but he had licked the tropics before and he would lick them again.

Men whom he had trusted had flown like startled coyotes, one after the other, as the fray thickened for quieter lands and advised him to do so if he wished to be buried with a whole carcass. But he had cursed them for a lot of pimply-faced pikers and worked like a dog to keep the road open. Little it mattered to him which outlaw side won in the war. It was the road he owed allegiance to. But one man can not run a railroad in any country, let alone the tropics, and he found himself with not a wheel

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turning for three days on the G. and A. And no thought of trying to get away had entered his mind.

Now and again he raised his head from the paper he was plotting on to stare at the wall and mutter. The last few months had been jammed full of trouble. Since the first day it was operated, the G. and A. had never paid one cent of dividends. Something had always happened to sweep away the profits. This had been a source of worry to the bankers who owned the road back in New York but they had complained little. Bankers are game gamblers. Furthermore, a time or two several of them had ventured down to Guayaran to see things at first hand. But the duration of their visits had been short to the extreme.

During a yellow fever scourge one of them who felt particularly like setting things right on "that lemon streak of rust" had seen *boteros* towing lines of bloated corpses from the river to a constantly increasing pile on the bank where the authorities were pouring kerosene on them and preparing to burn them. Exactly how much he slipped the captain is not known, but it is a fact that the captain up-anchored and sailed without taking time to discharge his cargo.

Each man who came down from New York returned with a glowing account of what Harmon had accomplished under the circumstances. He had a bulky file of letters telling him to stick with it and to use a free hand. This had caused him to vow in his heart that he would some day make the road pay dividends for them. Within the last few weeks he had been almost in sight of his goal. This fact had been the cause of the sob that crept into his voice. He was sore at his own impotence to do anything. It seemed that the dice were loaded against the G. and A. and against him. It was fate and nothing else. He cursed fate and swore he would show fate a few things.

THE door opened and a man entered. Harmon turned and stared at the intruder. The newcomer was an undersized individual garbed in the dress of a peon, consisting of a pair of dirty, white trousers, straw hat, shirt worn Chinese fashion on the outside of his trousers, and a pair of native sandals.

His face was covered by a scraggly growth of beard. The clothing was much too large for him and hung upon his emaciated frame for all the world like clothing that had been placed upon a scarecrow. What little face showed between straw hat brim and beard was burned dark brown by the sun. Harmon was just in the act of ordering him from the room as an upstart peon when he noted the eyes. They were blue and keen as briers. They fairly glittered in their hollow sockets. The look of surprize that came into Harmon's face caused the other man to smile. It was a twisted little effort of a smile that just barely showed through the unkempt beard.

"*Que queries tu?*" enquired Harmon gruffly.

"Meaning you think I'm a Yellow Belly! Never thought a native of Kentucky could be mistaken for what he is anywhere in the world——"

"Well, you're a typical tropical tramp, which isn't much better. Get out!" cut in the railroad official.

The little man sprang through the air like an angry cat. He landed by Harmon's side and shook his clenched fist under that worthy's nose.

"Look out, you old hellion! Stay in an old man's place! I came in to ask you for a job. Lay off of that insulting stuff. If you don't, I'll mop up with you! Or you'll mop up with me. And if you do, when you get through you'll know you've been fought with. Where do you get that stuff?"

The grit of the little man aroused the admiration of the other. He stood up, smiling, and towered over the wizened little figure, a great hulk of a man tipping the scales at two hundred and sixty-five.

"Yes, you'd fight me like a she-tiger. I know your breed. You're down on the rocks and you're still fighting. There ain't no give up in you. You've got a streak of lean. And you'll stick till the last gasp. I'm sorry I said what I did. I do know enough not to loose-herd men. But I'm up against the real thing and I forgot. Where did you blow in from?"

"Rio de Janeiro."

"Not afoot!"

"Yep. Every jump. I'm the last of a party of fifty. Came up through the Matto Grosso country, prospecting. Four of us made it into Iquitos. Beri-beri got the other three a few days after we left there. It was a long, lonesome trip from where I buried them to Rio Bamba, where I struck your line. And I sure have had to do some

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dodging from there here. These Yellow Bellies seem to be trying to kill each other off."

"What's your name?"

"Eugene Rodin."

"Mine's Harmon, David Harmon."

He stretched forth his hand and the two shook gravely.

"You spoke of wanting a job. I'll give you a better job than you expected to get. Consider yourself hired. I don't know what title I'll confer on you until later. I need a man of your breed. There's some work to be done and I'll pay you what it's worth."

Rodin chuckled.

"The first thing I want is to get outside of a feed. I haven't had a square one for months. I've been living on bark, roots and berries so long I feel like a chipmunk."

"Well, come on then. I haven't had much appetite for a week. You've put new pep into me. My cook hasn't showed up for a couple of days and I suppose he's buzzard bait by now. I've got the grub, whole cases of it. And I sure can cook."

He strode out the door and across the track with Rodin at his heels.

They presented an odd appearance. It was visually a case of lion and lizard, for a man's dignity disappears when he dons peon garb. But in reality it was an equality. They were both gifted with the streak of lean. And when that runs through the frame nothing else matters very much.

Arriving at the cottage, they found half a dozen gaunt-faced soldiers seated in the chairs on the piazza. Harmon grasped one hastily by the slack of the pants and the scruff of the neck and threw him bodily into the yard. The others took hasty leave. Harmon shouted polyglot curses at them at they fled.

"*No se queden aqui, pendejos!* Keep your darned army off of my porch! I'll *matar* the first one I catch around here in the future. *Diga* your *general* that I'll put a bullet into his hide also! *Saben Ustedes?*"

He laughed uproarously. For several days they had noted that the big *gringo* was alone and they had begun to encroach. Harmon had been too much worried to take time to pop the whip over them. There is no half-way measure to be used with people of this kind.

"I've got human clothes for you, too," he chuckled as they entered the cottage. "My secretary skipped and did not take time to get his trunk. He was about your size and I think his white ducks will fit you to a T. They'll fit better than that layout you've got anyway. There's a couple of razors in the bathroom. By the time you get rigged out I'll have the grub cooked. I always did want to get into that kitchen and show what I could do in the way of throwing together a feed. But I couldn't do it on account of my position, darn it."

Rodin found the trunk open and sorted out an armful of clothing. He disappeared into the bathroom as Harmon went into the kitchen. They both worked hastily and thoroughly. Harmon, however, had finished cooking the meal and had it on the table and sat fanning himself with a huge palm-leaf fan when Rodin emerged. A shave and a bath and the neatly pressed white duck suit had worked wonders with the erstwhile hobo. The removal of the mat of beard displayed a clean-cut face with hard set jaws and stubborn chin; the brushing back of the long hair showed him to be possessed of a broad intellectual forehead.

Harmon, though secretly pleased at the change that had been wrought, made no comment as they seated themselves in front of the hastily prepared banquet and prepared to eat. Rodin told of things he had seen on the long trail. He avoided speaking much of the death of his comrades, but now and then a look came into his eyes that advertised the fact that he remembered.

He told of mighty cañons he had come through, silent and majestic; of great moss-grown cliffs he had crawled on the brink of, that towered to the very heavens and where the slip of hand or foot would have hurled him thousands of feet below; forests thick with underbrush and peopled with hordes of cannibals, head-hunting Indians who stalked him for days at a time; of savage fish that tore at him as he swam the rivers; of predatory animals that slunk through the jungles as he fought his way forward with his machete; of slimy snakes and reptiles that squirmed under his feet in the swamps; of a thousand and one things that had happened to him that never would have happened had he been in civilization.

He told his story easily, without pride or

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boasting in his words. He felt that the other man would be interested. And Harmon hung on every word. It was the achievement of a submerged individual. Had an ex-president made a trip one-tenth as long, surrounded by droves of luggage bearers and servants to make things soft for him, it would have been touted to the whole world in song, moving-picture and story.

WHEN he had finished and sat silent, Harmon leaned nearer and peered searchingly into his face. Rodin met his gaze unflinchingly, the steel-blue eyes glittering like diamonds.

"Boy, I know I haven't made a mistake this time. I spoke of having work to be done. I've got gobs of it. For eight years my heart and soul has been tied up in this Guayaran and Andean *Ferrocarril*. When they wanted it built they sent for me. I had just finished a tough construction job on the Canpack through Kicking Horse Cañon in the Rockies. They explained they had an idea of building a road up from the coast through the banana and fruit belt and into the ancient mining country of the Incas. They asked me if it could be built. I told them it could. I also told them I was the man that could build it. I was younger then than I am now. And I never had been in the tropics. I talked big, for I felt big. My father was a very poor man, a section foreman on the Diamond Joe road that runs from Malvern, Arkansas, over to Hot Springs. I had achieved something and I was proud of myself. I guess that's human nature.

"But when I came down to make the preliminary survey for the location I saw I had bitten off a large chunk. I got a bunch of niggers and started slashing brush through the swamp toward the mountains. It was thirty miles, I found out, through a bottomless morass. More often than not I was to my armpits in mud. An alligator took me by the leg and dragged me under. Grappling with him, my thumb came in contact with one of his eyes. I pulled it out of the socket and tugged at it until he released his holt. I was snake-bitten a dozen times. I was stung by every kind of insect. Three times I was in the coils of a python larger than a man's leg. I kept my head and slashed myself free with my *machete*. I had yellow fever, bubonic plague, black water, typhoid, typhus and every other ill. My heart was strong. It pumped the stagnated blood through my veins. I survived when others died. I swore I wouldn't die and hung to the spark when it flickered feebly in my frame.

"Many times I was teetering between life and death and death looked sweet. But I fought to live. And I did live. I wanted to complete the location. That was as far as I could see at first. It took me months to locate the thirty miles from here through Black Swamp to the foot of the Andes. Then I thought I would have it easier. I had done some difficult locating through the Canadian Rockies, but as soon as I began scaling the sides of the Andes I saw that the location work I had done in the Rockies was nothing to what I had to do here. Sheer cliffs of solid stone rose in front of me that appeared to tower to the clouds. I had to travel for miles before I could find a way to the top of them and then I had my men let me down with ropes while I took a look at things through a hand level.

"I found cañons that appeared to lead up the mountains, but when I sought them out I found they ended abruptly in solid walls of stone. The one that I finally picked led for a few miles up the mountain and then was stopped by a great stone thousands of feet across. The natives called it "Nariz del Diablo," Devil's Nose, and that's what it's called today. On your way down you saw how I solved it, cutting a line right across the bridge of that solid chunk of stone. I located tunnels to put the rivers through and I used the old stream-beds for my track. I built bridges over chasms thousands of feet deep, bolting the bridges to the cliffs on either side. It is twenty-five hundred feet and three inches from the top of the rail on the Devil's Leap bridge to the surface of the water.

"And on top through the plateaus it was no better. I had to almost chisel a way around the base of Cotopaxi and Chimborazo volcanos, where the lava had run down and hardened in bygone years. That and the sand-dunes and the fevers kept me working at top tilt every second of the time to keep the end of steel moving forward daily."

Harmon paused and a smile illuminated his face. He pounded the table with his huge clenched fist.

"I located it. I built it. I put it in

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operation. And now, —— it, I'm going to make it pay dividends. And you're the man that's going to help me. People have paid me and trusted me to do this work. This road is something I have created. And it's going to deliver the goods for me, as I have done for it. And I'm going to pay you and trust you. I know you are going to stick."

Rodin laughed joyfully.

"Pop, I'll stick by you until the Guayas freezes over and these *cholos* are living in ice huts and traveling on snow-shoes!"

Harmon walked to the door and glanced out to see that no native loitered near. Now and then one of them understood a few words of English and he was taking no chances. He also walked to each window and glanced down to see that no *cholo* stood beneath listening. Had he only taken the trouble to look underneath the house, which set on piling several feet above the ground, much trouble would have been avoided. For a dark-visaged individual had just crawled underneath and even now craned his neck with an ear glued to a crack in the floor, straining to catch every word from within. He had on shoes, which proclaimed him a general. And his face was villainous enough for anything. In truth, it was no other than José Manuel Pacheco de tal de Lima, with many crimes to his credit, and even then leader of the revolution against the Government in Alto, the capital. But more of him anon.

Chimborazo Harmon returned to the table and, resting one foot upon a chair, began telling Rodin something which up to this time had remained a close-locked secret in his breast. It was about the twelve cars that set upon the passing siding at Ticlio. He had taken the trouble to have it noised about over the line that the North American Oro and Plata Company had gone broke over at La Cruz, ten miles across the mountains from Ticlio, and that the cars which had been sent in were to load their machinery and equipment to take out of the country.

The native employes at the mines had joined one side or the other in the war, either voluntarily or by force, and the loading had been done by the few Americans who remained. Under cover of night they had driven many pack-mule trains across the hills, each mule bearing on his back a heavy iron-bound box.

Only Harmon and the mine superintendent and the few Americans, who had stuck to the last, knew what these boxes really contained. It was the bulk of the metal, in bullion form, that had been taken from the mines for the past four years. It is true that they had been making small shipments of bullion from time to time, keeping the fact secret as to exactly how much the weekly clean-up amounted to.

It was a small isolated camp and a raid from some bandit band would have proven disastrous, and in consequence the stone *bodegas* had become jammed with bullion. The superintendent had whispered to Harmon that the total of silver and gold would run to something over fifteen million dollars. The freight on this would be heavy and would go a long way toward pulling the road out of the hole, and added to the other earnings for the year it would be the cause of the G. and A. declaring a small dividend. This and more David Harmon told Eugene Rodin before they retired for the night. In the morning the work was to begin.

II

DAY was just breaking when Chimborazo Harmon arose and threw the door open. He gave a whistle and stalked back into the room. He reached under the *pavillon* and shook Rodin roughly. Rodin opened his eyes. Seeing that the elder man was agitated, he sprang out.

"What's wrong, major?"

"——'s to pay. One side or the other had seized the road, from the way it looks. The only engine I had down on this end was the yard goat, and that's gone. So is every empty car from the yard. Some one had made a shipment of troops out of here while we slept. I suppose some *cholo* that has fired for me is pulling them. He won't be able to make more than ten miles an hour after he hits the mountain, with that goat. It's anywhere from four to six per cent. of hard dragging all the way up from there to Ticlio."

Rodin had struggled into his clothes and now ran out upon the piazza. Harmon followed, and they stood straining their ears in the direction of Black Swamp. A hollow roar came from that quarter.

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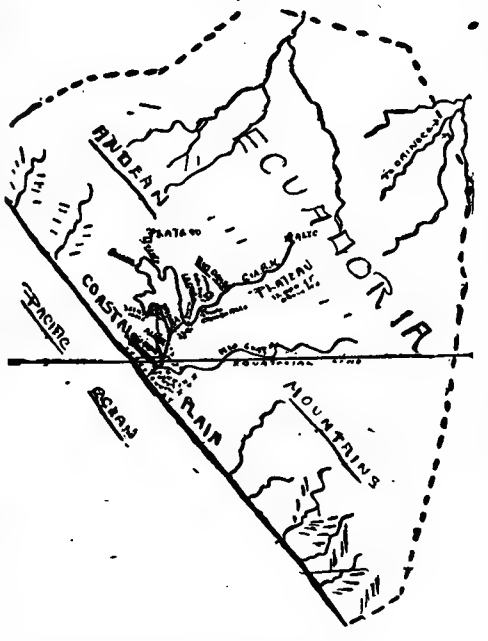
"They haven't been gone very long. They haven't begun to climb yet. If we had one of the road-engines we could overtake them," said Harmon sadly.

Eugene Rodin was thinking intently.

"Pop, what's the air-line distance from Alise to Ticlio, on a rough figure?"

Harmon took out a pencil and paper and drew a rough diagram on the door-jamb, giving Rodin an idea of the physical characteristics of the road:



He began calculating aloud.

"It's a hundred and four by rail—loop across Devil's Nose eighteen, spiral curve at Quigra twenty-six, horse-shoe at Cuento nine—let's see, let's see. It can't be much over forty miles air-line distance, through solid rock, between the two towns. If there was some way of getting through. What made you ask that?"

"Why, can't you see. You said, yourself, they couldn't do over ten mile an hour with the goat. The chances are, with a green 'hogger,' they won't be able to do that well. Even if they do, it will take them ten hours to make it. It's up to you and I to take the short cut and head them off. I have a hunch that somebody heard what you told me last night, and I know you have the same hunch. It takes something extraordinary to make these armies get to moving as early as they did. Let's get a hand-car and get across the swamp to the foot of the Andes, and then beat them out. I've just done twenty-four hundred miles through the wilderness and I'm hard as nails. If you play out I'll go on alone and stop them."

"I'm not going to play out!" blurted Harmon, his face growing purple at the insinuation. "Any time I do, you'll be dead. The chances are that I'll have to carry you the last twenty miles under my arm."

Rodin shouted with laughter.

"Come on! Let's quit squabbling and get under way. I just hinted that to see how your nerve was. I guess it's normal."

The two men started across the track at a dog-trot, belting on their revolvers as they ran. They picked up the flimsy little hand-car and set it on the rails. Just as they did so, a dozen or more ragged soldiers ran from the town and tried to intercept them. They were the rear guard General José Manuel Pacheco de tal de Lima had left to guard his advance, and had evidently taken the opportunity to regain a trifle of the sleep they had been losing. Seeing that the two Americans did not stop, a couple of them dropped to their knees and sent shots in the direction of the fleeting hand-car. These having gone wild of their mark and, being satisfied they had done their duty, they returned to whence they had come, to resume their napping. The two white men were pumping furiously on the handles of the car when it dashed around the curve beyond the round-house and out across Black Swamp.

The sweat was pouring from Harmon and Rodin when they staggered off the car two hours later at Alise. They had done fifteen miles an hour with it and the heat was stifling. They were panting so that speech was impossible. In answer to a questioning glance from Rodin, Harmon raised his hand to the left and aloft toward a wall of rock that frowned above them like a dozen sky-scrapers placed on end. Rodin nodded that he understood and they both struck off at a trot, hugging the face of the cliff, where the vegetation was not so rank. Soon they came to a crack in the solid face that extended from top to bottom and leaned slightly from the perpendicular. They stood heaving for a few minutes to regain their breath.

"It's lucky I happened to know where this fault in the rock is," said Harmon as

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he squeezed himself into the crevice and peered upward. Without waiting for Rodin to answer he clutched the wall on either side and began the ascent. Rodin waited until Harmon had climbed a few yards; then he began to follow. Soon they were high above the valley, weaving in and out of the crevice as they sought a precarious footing on the rocky wall. Near the top, where the crack in the stone narrowed down until it was only a few inches across and the brow of the cliff jutted out over the valley, their entire weight was supported the greater part of the time by the grip of their hands on small knobs of stone that barely offered a handhold. For the last fifty yards it required almost a superhuman effort to gain the dome of the cliff. When at last they had reached the crest, they reeled giddily and fell prostrate, the welcome air whistling into their lungs in great gasps. Rodin, being the lighter, regained his wind before the other. He sat up and peered straight upward. They were on a flat ledge, several hundred feet across. An unending line of cliffs, similar to the one they had climbed, towered above. Harmon tore off his light linen coat as he sat up.

"A few pounds of fat on me. Felt as if I was carrying a couple of coal buckets of lead up that wall. I'll burn that fat off me before night. And I'll get my second wind pretty soon," he grunted between breaths.

He rolled his sleeves to the shoulder and Rodin marveled at the great hairy arms, as large at the biceps as an ordinary man's thigh. Harmon was still a physical giant, in spite of his age. Rodin appeared more pigmy than ever as he tore off his own coat and tossed it down. Harmon's great bulk reproached him like a dare. He longed for an opportunity to prove himself as much of a man as the other. Nor did he have long to wait.

TOILING upward in the late afternoon, with the breath wheezing from their lungs, due to the altitude, which was now over eighteen thousand feet, and the exertion of the continual climbing, they came to a narrow ledge that just barely offered foothold for them. They were above the snowline and the narrow footing was made more precarious by being here and there covered with ice which had formed from water oozing from the rocks. Coming to a cavelike entrance, they stepped inside to catch their breath.

A low growl from within told them that some animal lurked in the darkness. A pair of luminous eyes flashed through the air in the direction of the larger man. He snatched for his revolver as Rodin, himself as quick as a cat, sprang to meet the animal in midair. They rolled out and hung balanced on the edge of the narrow stone in front of the cave, the animal screaming its wrath as its fangs and claws sank into Rodin's chest and neck, he plying his sheath-knife in quick, vicious jabs that went to the handle.

Harmon snatched for the tearing hind legs as the animal released its hold and, grasping them in a clutch of steel, thrashed its body against the solid wall. Rodin struggled to his feet. His shirt had been stripped from his body and purpling welts had begun to rise on his neck and chest. He was pale and trembling, but smiling.

"I caught him, but I had trouble in turning him loose!" he blurted. "What on earth is he?"

"Black tiger. Worst fighter in these Andes. Got more lives than a cat. Very seldom see one killed. I was just firing from the hip when you jumped in between."

He ran his hands over the marks the brute had made on Rodin's chest. Seeing that they were superficial, he grasped the little man beneath the arms and held him out in front of him at arm's length.

"Now, you darn fool, don't do that any more. You ain't no bigger than a handful of dried apples, but you're clean grit clear to the core. I knew that, without you going to work and proving it to me. Save your nerve! We may need all of it later."

The cold had begun to grip them. They were within a few miles of the equator but the altitude sapped the heat from the sun's rays. The tops of the mountains were covered with huge caps of solid ice and snow that measured hundreds of feet thick and represented the snow and sleet fall of eternal years. The blasts of wind that howled down through the high cañons were laden with fine particles of ice. The men shivered as if with an ague. Now and again the silence was broken in the distance by the roar of an avalanche, consisting of hundreds of acres of ice that had

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acked off of some mountain top and was aring its way to the bottom of a cañon, prooting trees and breaking huge chunks f stone from the mountainside.

Feeble they were when compared with ne magnificence and grandeur of these fty Andes, puny little 'earth worms, ut strong with the heritage of their lean- ewed ancestors who had had the egotism o cope with and conquer nature in all arts of the earth. They were the survival f the fit, through the thousands of genera- ions back to the prehistoric ooze from hich life had dared to crawl.

In them was the same spirit that had aused their ape ancestors to give vent to heir wrath in savage growls as they flung hemselves upon whatever opponent or bstacle blocked their path. In them the ide of evolution and biology surged like a orrent. They were in the front rank. They were of the type that venture and dare, the orerunners of the herd, that go ahead and soften the way for more timid natures in all parts of the earth, so that they may breed and bring forth after their kind.

Not that they, themselves, realized this. They were primarily men of action. Neither of them had ever delved into the whys and wherefores of things. Their law was that of the survival, their code the streak of lean that knows no fear.

By steady climbing for half an hour their bodies were steaming with perspiration. They were struggling more often than not in snow up to their waists and up over huge blocks of ice that were as sharp as glass in the equatorial sunshine. From the landscape and the temperature, they might as well have been at the poles.

Thinly clad as they were, they were forced to hasten now, for a few moments' pause would be the death of them by freezing. The peaks of the two volcanos, giving aloft dense clouds of smoke through their ice caps towered before them. Between was a pass so narrow that it appeared like a great gash. It was toward this gap they struggled. They were in an altitude of over twenty thousand feet. It became an exertion to move. Lassitude stole over them. Harmon fell and did not rise. Rodin flung himself upon him and pounded him in the face with his clenched fists. Harmon opened his eyes drowsily.

"Go away and let me sleep!" he grumbled.

Rodin felt with this thumbs for the nerves in the eye sockets and, having located them, closed down on them with a grip of steel. It was a trick he had learned from an osteopath.

Harmon sprung to his feet.

"Suffering *iguanas!*" he yelled. "What's happened to me?"

"You were just having a little nap and fell out of bed," panted Rodin.

Sleep was stealing over both of them. The lethargy of the high altitude had them in its grip. Harmon shook himself like a giant grizzly. He put his face close to Rodin's ear.

"We are going to need all the nerve we've both got to get through that pass!"

Rodin started to sink to his knees. Harmon grasped him and shook him as a terrior would shake a rat. Then, taking the little man's hand in his, he started up through the pass on a run. Rodin wrenched his hand free and trotted up to the other man's side. Their pace slowed down to a trot and then to a walk as they forged forward. Fire was flashing before their eyes, strange noises were in their ears, flecks of blood were beginning to appear on their lips and stream down upon their chests. They fell often. But they got up. And each time they headed through the pass. Strength left them. Reason left them. Breath left their lungs and just enough wheezed back in again to keep alive the spark of life.

But still they made headway through the drifts that blocked every foot of the way. The will to survive was ingrained too deep in them to surrender—to survive and to achieve. By years of hardship, in each of them the streak of lean had grown until now it mastered them and worked involuntarily like a muscle that moves a limb when it has been severed from the body.

Thus, as men bereft of life and reason, ghosts walking through the silence, they won their way through the pass and started down the other side. Every yard they descended brought more oxygen into their lungs. Things began to grow clear to them.

They turned to look each other in the face. Each grunted with amazement. For their faces were frostbitten so black their own mothers would not have known them. An immense icicle of blood-streaked ice hung from each man's mouth. Their bloodshot eyes protruded like knobs from their sockets. The pressure from within

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their skulls which had been adjusted by nature to withstand an outward force of fifteen pounds per square inch at sea-level was forcing their skulls outward, for the weight of the air at this place was less than seven pounds per inch. Every drop of blood and every cell of brain ached with the expansion which the straining skull kept in check. Nausea seized them. Their stomachs quivered and throbbed with *seroche*, the high altitude sea-sickness. Sweat mixed with blood poured from every pore and smeared their faces and oozed through their scant clothing.

Tottering about, like decrepit old men, they begun to gather up handfulls of snow and rub themselves with it. Then, staggering from side to side like men whose heads are light with wine, they began the descent to the plateau which stretched like a table less than ten miles below. On the bare plains the sand dunes showed like tiny hillocks, horn-shaped and with their horns pointing toward the wind. In and out among these wove a tiny black ribbon. It was the main line of the Guayaran and Andean Railroad. Beyond, and beyond, it disappeared behind the blue-black base of hoary-headed Chimborazo volcano. Down below was a wide spot in the ribbon, barely discernible with the eye. This was Ticlio siding, the destination of the two men.

As they shaded their bleared eyes and peered at it, they noted that trains sped in its direction from either side, from about an equal distance. And beyond the hills, a black smudge of smoking ruins bespoke the destruction of the Oro and Plata mining camp. A tiny cloud of dust hovered over the trail leading from the burned mining camp in the direction of Ticlio siding as the band of bandits that had swooped from their mountain retreat, man and beast laden with spoils from the commissaries and quarters, left the gutted camp and the mutilated bodies of the Americans and came out to find settlements in which to trade for fiery rum and boisterous amusement. Thus Ticlio was approached from four directions at the same time.

The sun had sunk to rest behind the mountains at their back. Darkness was falling, suddenly, without twilight, as it does on the equator. Giant condors, largest of winged creatures, left off soaring over the valley and wheeled their way upward into the snowclad mountains to the roosting places. The clouds that hung over Cotopaxi and Chimborazo volcanos began to glow like clouds of molten gold. The earth shook slightly as one or the other of them grumbled his discontent. A feeble rattling came up from below from the two trains and now and then a firefly light appeared on one side or the other as the fireboy opened the door and crammed the firebox with coal.

And down the bare cliff walls, like prehistoric apes, two men picked their way by sense of touch. The ever increasing warmth burned their frostbitten flesh until it ached to the bone. Strange atavistic senses, long buried in the night of the ages, came back to them. They felt, they smelt, they knew their way without knowing how they knew. They were drawing on that reserve force that some men discover exists in them, that force that makes frail man the hardest animal on the face of the globe to wrest the life from. That and the streak of lean and the ever increasing wrath which burned in their hearts at the fact that both trains would arrive at Ticlio ahead of them forced them to their task.

III

WHEN José Manuel Pacheco de tal de Lima, greedy for money and aspirant to the rich picking incident to being president of the country, heard what General Superintendent Harmon told Eugene Rodin in the room above, his face grew keen as a coyote's and his eyes glowed with a baleful light. His heart grew hungry for the treasure as a starved wolf's heart lusts for fresh-killed meat.

He waited until he had heard every word and the men had gone to bed before he crept forth and slunk down the street of the native village. In his mind were cunning devils that whispered deep distrust of his fellow men in general, and his fellow patriots in particular. He paused before a low adobe hut, thatched with straw. Two bare-footed sentries, clad in blue overalls, stood at either side of the door. They presented arms sloppily and made a pretense of standing at attention.

"Who goes there?" one of them asked drowsily.

"A patriot of Ecuadoria."

"Advance forward, patriot, and deliver the password."

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"*Libertad.*"

José Lima twisted his black mustache and yed the closed door shrewdly. The sound f ribald laughter told him that General latino Fonseco Silvestre de Alfaso was ntertaining friends. He had counted on is being alone. He turned to one of the entries.

"Soldier!"

"Command, sir, your humble servant."

"Who is within?"

"All of your great leaders, your Majesty, f the glorious revolution, God be praised, vith the girls from the village."

"*Buenol* Tell them that one whose ieart is bursting with love and affection or the dear native land, none other than heir noble general, José Manuel Pacheco le tal de Lima, desires that they meet with nim in conference at the Casa Piedra within the hour, and that the urgency is great for the cause of the patria."

He turned on his heel and walked down the street to the revolutionary headquarters in the Casa Piedra, which had formerly been a dance-hall. In front of the place he met a skulking soldier and ordered him to enter and light the kerosene lamps. He began pacing up and down the floor, thinking just how much information he would impart to his trusted leaders to get them to help him bring the twelve cars of bullion down to the coast and help him get it aboard ships, where he would be in position to double-cross them and give them the slip.

Of one thing he was sure. It would never do to tell them it was bullion. If he should be so careless as to drop a hint to that effect, a mad race would begin, with each one trying to get it for himself. It was better, he decided, to say that the cars had been loaded there in Guayaran with supplies and ammunition brought in ships from Panama and slipped in under their noses and that the railroad company had been forced to leave them there at Ticlio when the road shut down. He would urge haste for fear the *Federalês* should learn of this fact, seize a locomotive and come down for them. This, he could show, would prove disastrous to the revolution, for neither army numbered more than five hundred men and a trainload of supplies and weapons would go a long way toward arming and equipping those of them who now had nothing but *machetes*.

We have seen with what success his efforts were crowned. Each general seized upon the cunningly thrown out hints and inuendoes behind the mask of patriotism, which was always to the fore in each man's conversation. The meeting closed with drinks of native rum after midnight and each leader sent runners to herd together his band of conscripted ragamuffins, who had previously served as peons on his plantation for a pittance that equalled five American pennies per day and were at that moment sleeping in the straw *ranchos* of friends and relatives and on the platforms of the railroad buildings out of reach of prowling alligators.

Gangs of them had been placed to pushing the empty box cars from the yard-tracks out upon the main line. A former roundhouse laborer, who had always yearned to run a locomotive, was put to getting up steam in the yard engine. The corpses that were in the cars were rolled out upon the ground, the men and their light impedimenta were bundled in, the engineer, himself the center of admiring *cholos*, backed down and coupled on to the cars and the train crawled away. Never had things been done so swiftly in Guayaran or in all Ecuadoria before. It is a land of *mañana*. If there is anything more popular than *mañana*, it is *pasado mañana*, which means day after tomorrow.

BUT there was a weak link in the chain of General José Lima. The man he had ordered in to light the lamps was no friend of the revolution; he was far from such although he professed to be while they were in control of the city. He had been a telegraph operator in the employ of the Federal Government in the Guayaran office at the handsome salary of several *sûcres* per *quincena*, the entire total for the month, with what small graft that came his way, often amounting to eight dollars, American money. The revolutionists had raided the office, captured the cash-till half full of copper *centavo* pieces and played merry hob with everything. Further, the *telegrafista* had been made to vow eternal friendship to the cause with a keen edged *machete* at his throat, in the hands of a man who would rather have cut it than leave it intact, were it not so much of an effort.

This telegraph operator was thirsting for

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revenge. Being a man of prominence his feelings had been sorely injured. He had been in the habit of creeping into the office late at night and making a report to the Alto office by wire as to just how things were coming on in the center of the revolt. This information was transmitted to the Government officials in power and they were preparing their plans accordingly. Probably in the run of several months, according to the usual course of things, they would come down and wipe the *revolucionistas* off the slate.

But the information the telegrapher ticked to his superior in Alto on this night put things to humming at the other end. General Estrada Cabrera Menendes de Zelaya y Vaca, in command of the loyal forces at the capital, was coming out of a banquet arrayed in his pea-green uniform with gold braid sewed on every conceivable place, his plumed hat, his high boots, his clanking spurs and his upward-tilted mustache. He was a figure such as would arouse the admiration of every peon girl in the republic. He growled his annoyance when a *teniente* stood before him and saluted with a flourish.

The lieutenant, for there were officers who ranged so low in the scale, pressed the telegram into his hand. The general read it and then perceptibly wilted at the knees. He knew José Lima for what he was, a man of great cunning and not a little daring, for Lima had been in his command previous to the revolt he had engineered. Also he knew that the Government had ordered no munitions or supplies that could be in the cars at Ticlio. He did not know what they contained but feared the worst. It might be a train load of dynamite that had been sent in for the North American Oro and Plata Company, the hated *gringo* miners at La Cruz. He knew that José Lima was keeping the contents a secret, for some cause or other, from his associates. Possibly he planned an attack on the capital and a blowing up of the Government buildings with explosives. He feared Lima greatly and he was aware of the fact that Lima did not fear him, and he knew in his heart that it was only lack of funds and supplies that had held the revolutionists from coming up and storming the city.

There was nothing to do but requisition a train and beat the *revolucionistas* to Ticlio and bring the cars with whatever they contained back to Alto. He gave the lieutenant orders to this effect and went home to change his wardrobe for a campaign uniform. War is a mussy business at the best.

And be it said, to the credit of the Federalés, with fear popping the whip over them, that they moved with as great swiftness and dispatch as the revolutionists had done in Guayaran, and the train was under way before daylight. It had a longer distance to travel and less time to do it in, but the going was down-grade. The outcome of it was that both trains approached Ticlio siding at the same time. José Lima, sitting in the locomotive on the seat box behind the engineer, prodded him in the back with the point of a sheath-knife and forced him to pull up the main several car lengths beyond the bullion cars and kept him going until the engine crawled up to within a few feet of the Federal troop train, which had just come to a stop. The bandit leader, on his way down from the mines, noted this from afar and gave orders to his men to stop and await further developments.

The moon had come up and it was as bright as day. The troops of each train began piling from the cars. Be it said here and now that when it comes to hard hand to hand fighting the *cholo* and the Quichua and the mixed strains in between are not to be despised. Poor, down-trodden, mistreated slaves, it is no wonder they are lazy and shiftless under ordinary circumstances. But when the chance for slashing a man to pieces with a knife, or fighting man to man in the old-fashioned way, the primitive red and the primitive black surge to the surface, for the mixture is black, red and white, in various proportions. The troops of both trains scented a killing. Their officers herded them into the semblance of lines of battle, at right angles to the track, keeping well to the rear in the meantime, and the fight was about to begin. The bandits, laden with the loot from the mining camp, keeping the bullion cars between them and the two armies, began creeping forward to find out the lay of the land. The telegraph operator, armed with a long spanner, had dropped off of José Lima's troop special and was even then working frantically to unloosen the bolts that held the Devil's Leap bridge girders to the cliff walls on either side.

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IV

AT THIS juncture two shadowy forms paused long enough at the lower switch to throw it over, ving the rail from the switch to the ain. The larger man, stooping like a ant gorilla, carried in his hands a club veral feet long and half as thick as a an's body—a piece of wood his feet ld come in contact with as he stumbled ross the plateau. The other man was naller and trod with the stealth and quick- ss of a tiger. In his hand he clutched a nife and his elbow was bent ready to rike. They went along the side of the rs, removing the wooden scotches that ad been placed in front of the wheels by ie train crew. Then, clambering aloft ey began to release the hand brakes.

So intent were the leaders of the two rmies upon each other's movements, and o intent were the bandits upon both of hem, that they had been unobserved until hey had released the brakes of eight cars nd were letting off the ninth, when José ima, peering back over his shoulder, saw hem. His voice broke the stillness in a ighty yell.

"The gold. Some one is stealing the cars f gold and silver. *Madre de Dios, Santsima*, stop them!"

Cries broke from the throats of the men f both armies and from the bandits as hey rose to their feet and raced toward the ars. The soldiers of both armies ran eck and neck, the gold-lust taking place f the blood-lust in their hearts, and they warmed up one side of the train as the andits swarmed up the other. Harmon nd Rodin were letting off the last brake and he train was rolling out on to the main when the tops of the cars and the ladders nd bumpers became covered with a surging mass of shouting humanity. Seeing but two men crouched on the forward car, they swarmed toward them in a chattering, angry wave. The train was gaining momentum at every turn of the wheels.

When the mob had come to within a few feet of them, the two men sprang into their very faces. The huge club began to rise and fall with the quickness of an eyeflash, swooping several men from the car at each descent. The knife of the smaller man was jabbing into throats and hearts with the speed of lightning. Never had these *cholos* and Quichuas been called upon to face such whirlwind demons as these.

Harmon and Rodin cleared the first car and sprang to the next. The huge club snapped and Harmon snatched a tall native by the feet and began using him as a club to mow the others from the car. Rodin had left his knife in a man's ribs and was using his revolver as a club. Snapping a sword from an officer's belt, he began to clear an ever increasing space in front of him. Nor were they coming through uninjured. Their faces and heads were gashed in a dozen places from which hot blood poured in blinding streams. The moonlight painted them with an unholy light. They appeared unreal, inhuman, imps of hell fighting to destroy. Superstition clutched the hearts of the primitive natives. Startled yells from savage throats rent the air. They began scrambling down the ladders and leaping to the rocky right of way or diving head first from the tops of the cars, to go hurtling down the cañon sides to a mangled death.

The primitive white, a thousand times more ferocious than primitive red or primitive black, the blood of their white ape ancestors, long buried by veneering with thousands of years of civilization yet the conquering blood that had conquered other colors in contests with claw and fang back in the night of the ages, had been born anew in the two white men.

They roared and screamed their wrath as they flung themselves upon those that remained, in great chuckling hair-raising growls that chilled the very blood in the cowering men's veins. And they tossed them like chaff from the car-tops. They did not cease fighting until no one remained on the train but themselves. And they stood panting until they recollected who they were and that they were on top of a train that was running away. Harmon cocked his ear to the thud of the wheels over the rail joints.

"We're doing better than forty miles per hour," he shouted above the clatter of the train.

They both flew to setting hand-brakes. From one car to the other they went, doubling on each brake-wheel until the shoes ground against the wheels of the car. The train slackened perceptibly and began to race again. They went over the brakes again from rear to head end, setting each

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brake as tight as they could by their utmost exertion. When they reached the front car again Harmon listened to the slap of the wheels over the joints. The wind was beating in his face until he shaded his mouth with his hands as he shouted into Rodin's ear—

"A fraction over sixty!"

Rodin crawled to the edge of the car and looked underneath. The brake shoes were a cherry red and the journals had begun to smoke. The train was beyond control and was being hurled down the winding grade by gravity at an ever-increasing rate of speed. At any minute it might fly off at a tangent like mud from a revolving wheel and end in a mass of twisted steel and splintered wood at the bottom of a cañon. There was one chance in a thousand that it would hold the rail.

The speed at which they rounded the curve above Devil's Nose bridge was terrific. Straight below them five hundred feet was the track as it wound back. And right there was the gap over which the bridge spanned. Harmon looked where it should be and pointed. Speech was impossible at the rate of speed they were now traveling. The moonlight, with the strength it has in high altitudes, shone down into Devil's Gorge with the power of a searchlight. It showed two tiny, gleaming rails stretching from the mouth of the tunnel on one side to the mouth of the tunnel on the other—the rails and the ties spiked to them. The ties had upheld the rails on the girders; now the rails upheld the ties. The girders were gone. They lay far at the bottom. The telegraph operator had unbolted them from the cliff sides. Even now he crouched above one of the tunnels watching to see the fruit of his labors.

Eighty, ninety, a hundred miles an hour the train leaped forward, gaining momentum at every foot. The two men sprawled and lay clutching the running-board of the car. They turned and peered into each other's face. They were approaching the tunnel just at the end of Devil's Leap bridge. Beyond that short tunnel were two flimsy rails, a hundred feet long, that spanned a twenty-five-hundred-foot chasm. These rails they well knew were feeble enough. They were not solid, but pieces of rail bolted together with angle bars and bolts less than an inch in diameter. Rodin grinned into Harmon's face. This was death as he had wished it, death all at once and in a final glorious splurge. And Harmon grinned back and bowed his head to the wind.

Then the train shot into the tunnel. A dark flash and it was out upon the rails. The roar ceased. It seemed that the train was suspended in mid-air. It happened in an instant. But to the men, holding their breaths and looking downward, it seemed as if they hung there for ages. The train was traveling on the flimsy rails as a fast skater goes over thin ice. The force of the momentum was offsetting gravity. It shot into the tunnel on the other side with an ear-rending roar, dashed through and around the curve on the other side and headed down the tangent toward Black Swamp.

The axles and wheels, as well as the journals and brake-beams, had grown red-hot from the friction of the rails and the grip of the brake shoes. Long streamers of flame were stretching back from the blazing waste in each journal-box and licking at the wooden bodies of the cars. The noise of the train reached a mighty, ear-splitting crescendo as it snapped around the curve like the lash of a coiled spring and headed down the straight stretch of track, quivering like a gigantic arrow of taut steel and wood and leaving in its wake a trail of fire and smoke that ever grew in volume. The floor of the head car caught afire with a guttering crackle. In an instant the flame, fanned to fury by the wind, had swooped the entire length of the train and was tearing at the flimsy bodies of the other cars.

There was no reckoning the speed of this flaming mass as it flung itself across Black Swamp. The bodies of the two men lifted in the wind and thrashed against the top of the car. It seemed that either their arms would be torn from their sockets, or the bolts of the running-board, to which they clung, would rend through the wood. The impact from the air was so harsh that it cut like a knife at the blackened flesh on their faces and threatened to strip them bare to the bone. The flames enveloped the entire train except the spot to which they clung. The pressure of the wind was so great it beat back the flames from this tiny oasis.

The second hand of a watch could have measured it in ten trips around its circle, from the time they reached the foot of the

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ountain at Alise until the broad Guayas ushed into view. The train boomed like meteor through Guayaran yards, swept ıe bumping blocks from the end of the harf as if they had been straws, sprang r out above the water, and dived out of ght beneath the surface of the river, send- g aloft fire and flame, steam and mud ıd pieces of charred wood like the eruption a volcano. Then everything was very, ry, quiet.

It seems impossible that the two men uld have withstood the shock. But fate ıd preserved them so far. And fate still ıd them in hand. When the train struck the water they were torn from their perch by the impact and sent flying along the top of the water, like ricochetting bullets, with such force that it stripped the few clothes from their bodies. They came to rest and sank lazily under the water, once, twice, and then the streak of lean bade them strike out and swim toward the coconut fringed shore.

Tomorrow it would bid them begin recruiting men, set idle by the finish of the war, start raising the chests of bullion and operating the G.and A. in two sections, until the new girders for Devil's Leap bridge could be shipped from the States.

THE TRANSIENT

by Richard Leo Hays

OUT of that limbo of God-knows-where,
Of stark adventure around the Line,
He came with his bulk and his ready air,
To lounge and be pleased with our good red wine:
Scraps of Spanish and tropical stuff,
Bêche-de-mer and the slashing seas,
Flashes of inland life in the rough,
Black-eyed women and mooned palm-trees.

We talk of him now, we fat and pale,
Mulling the yarns that he left behind,
And he's humping the bluey on some slim trail,
Outward-bound and as free as the wind.
Somehow it's deader, our old quiet place,
And we look for his smile and his talk of men,
For the lazy eyes in the hard, brown face,
And his shoulders filling our doors again.

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THE CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance: many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SINCE all who have written in about it have endorsed the above as a good "coat-of-arms" or emblem for our Camp-Fire, I suppose we may as well consider it adopted. Of course our 71 on its three-colored field is the Camp-Fire badge but this other emblem, which can be satisfactorily reproduced in black and white, will also serve a useful purpose. For example, on a sign in front of one of those "stations."

ONCE more the Gila Monster, our old comrade Alex. McLaren, giving us some further data:

Ruby, Arizona.

In your issue of June third I note that our old friend the Gila Monster has again cropped up in a letter from Mr. Williams. Just who Mr. Williams refers to in his enquiry or challenge, I am in doubt, yet, having been partly instrumental in the starting of this discussion, far be it from me to drop out at this stage of the game. Not being extra familiar with Congress Street and its shops, can not say that I remember seeing one in any of the windows there, and as for the Santa Rita I hardly think our friend Mr. Iager was ever guilty of keeping any of the reptiles in his hotel lobby.

HOWEVER, I have seen a number in captivity, but the most I have seen have been in their native haunts. I found them more numerous in a strip of desert that lies between Cave Creek and the Hassyampa River in Arizona. Another district where I remember seeing a great number is that strip of country in Yavápai Co., Arizona, to the west of the Santa Maria River through to Burro Creek, also between the Santa Maria and the Harqua Hala Mountains.

Just who the party is that mentioned handling the birds I do not know, but believe me when I do it it is at the end of a stick. In one of my

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rs I said "breath is said to have a sickening
t, but from personal experience can not say.
y snap viciously and poke a stick at one and
vill grab the end of it."

ALSO made the statement that I had tried to
ill one with a dose of K C N and had to resort
itric acid. The reaction that takes place is
erned by the condition of the animal's stomach,
ther the lining be acid or alkaline.

OT long since I was in Los Angeles and hap-
pened across a man who claimed to be author-
on all kinds of reptiles, and I guess he did know
ething about them as he had a house full of all
ds, and among them several Gila Monsters. He
l me that they were said to be very poisonous,
that he thought that the extent of that was
great measure due to what they were feeding
an old carcass, for instance. He said that in
course of his experiments with them he had
en one just fresh from the range, where it had
sibly been feeding on carrion, caused it to bite
abbit and that the rabbit died in great agony,
that he had taken that same reptile and fed it
several weeks on clean food, such as eggs, then
sed it to bite a rabbit and that same rabbit lived.
w understand, I personally did not see this ex-
iment pulled off, but merely relate it as given me.
ike Mr. Williams I have cowpunched, mined,
spected and hunted for the best part of thirty
rs, all over the West but particularly in Texas,
w Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, California and
vada, and hotel lobbies have been far-apart
curies for me.
Well, this would not be a real good Camp-Fire
less there was some argument going on.—ALEX
LAREN.

ADVENTURE'S new comrade, *Romance*, will make its first appearance October
relfth. When you see it on the stands I
pe you'll take a look and form your own
dgement. In it you'll find stories by
me of our own writers as well as stories by
me who have never appeared in our pages.
m not going to toot its horn, but I do
ant you to form your own opinion and
ve an idea that most *Adventure* readers
ill like *Romance*. I'll be very glad to
t your frank, unvarnished judgment
ter you've read Vol. 1, No. 1. Will you
op me a line when the time comes?

THE following is really a "Lost Trails" inquiry but, being too lacking in detail
r brief statement, we are glad to have it
ere at Camp-Fire. Are any of you any
f them?

Ft. Worth, Texas.

Concerning travelers that I would like to find, hat I have met with in some of my wanderings round the country, and don't know their names but they might know me), I would be very glad if ou would publish a small synopsis of what I will cribble below. Not all of it, as it would be too much worthless gush, but pickings here and there, enough to make a respectable showing, you know.

ON MY hikes, from Ft. Wayne, Ind., to Erie, Pa., and from Buffalo, N. Y., to Susquehanna, Pa., in 1913, from Portland, Ore., to "Frisco," Calif., in 1914. From "Frisco," Calif., to Seattle, Wash., in 1915. In my trip in 1914 I met a comrade in N. Calif. who had been on a hike for over 17 years, around the world, and had over 6 years more to go, making 23 years all told, and I also met him, in Tacoma, in 1915. In 1915, myself and two others met two fellow travelers in Southern Oregon, I think between Ashland and Medford, who were then hiking around the rim of the U. S. A. on a wager. They had started out, 4 of them, but the other two left for troubles of one kind or another. I think that one of them lost his father in the East. Had quite a chat with them.

I HAVE had quite a good many exciting adventures in every State west of the Mississippi River except N. Dakota; in Old Mex.; along the Border; Canada; on the broad Pacific Ocean, and in six Eastern States, including Ill., Ohio, Ind., Penn., Mich., N. Y. We must not think that all of the exciting times are excluded from the U. S. A. and that they are to be found only in foreign lands, as we are certainly on the wrong side of the fence when we even think so, and if some of the travelers who haven't been over all of the most out-of-the-way places in the U. S. A. will take some of the short cuts in this country, I dare say that they will still find a good many hair-raising and exciting times, that haven't been in print yet. And if any one thinks that this is bosh, let him or her try some of the Western half of this country, or ask some of the more experienced ones, who do know, and they may not be so anxious to tackle the proposition themselves. Have gone a few times postponing my meals, but I have never missed any that I am aware of. Once in the Rockies I went 3 days, once in the Cascades 3 days, and I was 4½ days on the Great American Desert, in western Utah, without sight of anything but sand, and plenty of that, and if I hadn't had a bottle of water I would have been strictly up against it. I could sit down and talk for three weeks and I couldn't tell the same story twice, but that is neither here nor there. I had a monogram in my travels, and some of the travelers must have come across some of them, somewhere, of different colored chalk.

There is, or was, a "Denver-Slim" who was considered a desperate hombre, but I can assure you that I am not the same party, and possibly if I had known of same beforehand, I would have chosen a different cognomen. I was born in Hannibal, Mo., in 1880, but I am just as proud of the fact that I am a citizen, of Texas as I am that I am a Missourian, if Missourians are all considered travelers and can not stop long enough to change their shirts.—CHAS. D. (Denver-Slim) BURNETTE.

The monogram is an arrow running through a circle, with E. and W. or N. and S. at either end, the head labeled "To" and the rectangle at the feather end labeled "From." In the circle below the arrow-shaft is "Denver." Above is something I can't read clearly—looks like "W 175." Perhaps it is "M 175," for 175 miles.

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ONE of the things that may make us here in the office white-haired is the matter of foreign words and phrases used in our fiction stories. It seems a simple matter to make sure they are correct. When we don't know ourselves we ask those who do, so far as they are available. But what is to be done when, for example, a critic says so-and-so in a story is not correct Spanish and the author of the story says it is the way Spanish is used in the particular locality where his story is laid? We don't know how all the languages of the world are spoken in all the localities in the world and neither does any one else. When you get a flat contradiction from two authorities both of whom should know, how would you decide which is right?

All the other magazines make mistakes in such matters, but *Adventure* probably has to handle more diverse questions along this line than any two of the others. So you'll have to make allowances and be easy on us.

Here is something from Edgar Young which bears on the subject:

Brooklyn.

I am attaching one of several articles I wrote for the *Editor* a few years ago along the same line. The Spanish language is spelled when correctly used the same in Latin America as in Spain. The difference is in the *idioma* or dialect of the unlettered. There is a slight difference in all these dialects between countries from Mexico all the way south. Chile and Argentine speak the worst dialect. The Peruvians speak perfect Spanish. Written words are the same, when in good Spanish, whether printed in Spain or Latin America, except in joke books which bring out dialects when the mispronounced words are spelt in Spanish letters. What I mean is that it would never do to have an off-colored word of Spanish spelt in English and italicized. The Mexican peon is called a *pelao* (paylow) and the correct Spanish is *pelado* (pay-lah-do), etc.

The language of Brazil is Portuguese and the difference is in the dialect of the spoken language of Brazil, similar to the differences in the English of England and here, the South, and West.

I am familiar with the outstanding points of difference of the Latin American dialects, except the Guianas and as they are a mixture of slave English (from the runaways), French, Portuguese, and Spanish, mixed with local Indian I am not familiar enough to know how they are spelled and pronounced.—EDGAR YOUNG.

THE demand for our metal identification cards continues strong and steady. Indeed, they have met such a practical need that for every one of the free pasteboard cards there are three or four aluminum cards called for at twenty-five cents each. Since the two are exactly the same except as to material and the pasteboard cards are just as good for ordinary pocket purposes, it seems that the heavy call for the metal cards must be mostly from those who go out of the beaten paths and need a card that will stand water and hard wear of all kinds. Some day we'll have the stories of some of those cards.

IF SOME one else wants to present the opposite side of the case with equal brevity, we'll print it for the sake of fairness, but a general discussion of the Jap question, with all the bitterness involved, doesn't seem just the thing for Camp-Fire. Perhaps even the following letter should not appear, but I believe so firmly in the need of excluding *all* immigration from this country until we have really Americanized what we have already that I'm falling for this kick against one of the foreign races even though it praises another. Japanese, Chinese, Germans, English, Italians, Hungarians and all the rest of them, no matter whether good or bad, should be kept out until we have had time to make real citizens out of those already here—and out of ourselves.

A country profits by getting new blood, but not after it has reached the point where what it has of good is imperilled by too many foreigners—and natives—who do not understand the real meaning of Americanism, citizenship and democracy. Exclude the Japanese by all means, but make a clean sweep of it and exclude all other foreigners along with them. Then the Japs can raise no cry of discrimination. And we can have time to set our home in order by building up an America that will have something more worth while to offer the peoples of other nations and that we can keep worth while after sharing it with them.

Taunton, Mass.

Have just finished reading what Wm. M. McCoy tells about his knowing Chinamen, and I want to add my "little bit," especially since I'm all "fed up" on the "bunk" about the Japs.

Though I've never been in China or Japan, I wandered quite a bit through the West, where I came in contact with both Japs and Chinks, and I say, "Me for the Chink." They will, and do, treat a "bo" white, which is more than can be said of the Jap. I have wandered through the West a little, and always found the Chinamen "white" and square, but the Jap just the opposite. In this vicinity the general opinion seems to be that the Japs are everything that is good, but I can't see it, so take this opportunity of blowing off steam.

With best wishes to the Camp-Fire comrades,—F. T. TRACY.

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THIS copy of our magazine goes on the stands September eighteen. Two days later, September twenty, *Adventure's* new cousin, *The Home Sector*, makes its first appearance. It is issued by The Butterick Company, but Butterick is the parent company of The Ridgway Company, which issues our magazine, and *The Home Sector* lives on the same floor with *Adventure*, *Romance*, *Everybody's*, *The Delineator*, *The Designer* and *The Woman's Magazine*, seven of us in all.

A great many of you already know its editors and what they can do in the way of turning out a good publication, for they are the men who turned out *The Stars and Stripes*, the official paper of the A. E. F. They can state their case better than I:

THE HOME SECTOR, which makes its first appearance with this issue, is a weekly magazine designed to serve, inform, interest and entertain the new civilian.

It is dedicated and will be devoted to the four million eight hundred thousand men who served the United States of America in the war against Germany; to the two million who went overseas—above all, to the seventy thousand of them who will never return; to the two million who were waiting on Armistice Day in the camps at home—"the last great reserve army of civilization;" to the half-million more who manned the fleet and the transports, holding open the longest line of communication that an army had ever dreamed of maintaining, holding it open in the face of the blackest menace the seas ever knew.

The new weekly will be conducted by the former editorial council of *The Stars and Stripes*, the official newspaper of the American Expeditionary Forces. A fortnight before peace was signed, that newspaper published its final number and so brought to an end the history of an institution which was born of the needs of the A. E. F. It served those needs according to the lights of the soldiers—almost a squad of privates and two or three dehorned non-coms.—who, chosen from the ranks of outfits already in France, wrote almost all its copy and drew almost all its pictures and who, from first to last, shaped its editorial destinies. Of these men it may be said that they kept the weekly "by and for the soldiers of the A. E. F.," kept it faithful in word and deed to the troops to whom it was dedicated. If it interested the folks at home, if it satisfied the powers at G. H. Q., so much the better. But it was edited to interest and satisfy the men in the ranks.

Now *The Stars and Stripes* has been drawn down, folded up and put away, never to be taken out again unless America embarks on another expedition—a production and an inspiration of the troops, too closely identified with their struggle and their sacrifice to permit of its being brought into the market-place.

But while *The Stars and Stripes* can not and should not be transplanted to civilian life, the journalistic principles which it embodied and the fun-loving, bunk-hating spirit which animated it can be and should be transplanted, and so the men whom chance and war brought together to edit the soldiers' weekly are not now, in their red-chevron days, parting company. They are keeping close formation to edit this new weekly, which will be the better if it can also enlist the aid of those wags and poets who, from dugouts and lousy billets and the great cold base-port barracks, used to send in to *The Stars and Stripes* the things which they thought were funny and the thoughts they had which were beautiful. To be their voice in time of peace as surely as *The Stars and Stripes* was their voice in time of war, that is the ambition of *The Home Sector*.

In this, the home sector, there are no dugouts, no endless streams of guns and rolling kitchens and thumping field-pieces, up to their hubs in muck. There are no lines of helmeted doughboys ready to go over beneath the umbrella of a rolling barrage. The guns and the barrages are in the salvage pile. The equipment for the home sector is a new issue. It knows no rifle, no gas mask, no dungarees, no shirt, flannel, O. D. Its uniform is not uniform—it may be blue serge or mixed tweed, single-breasted or double—and where is the supply sergeant to say no? Indeed, where is the supply sergeant himself? Gone—gone with all the rest of it.

What, then, is left for the nearly five million former service men to bring back with them into the home sector. A belief in their country, for one thing, a belief that, as she was worth fighting and risking life for, so is she worth living for; a belief that there are campaigns yet to be waged to the end that she may be a better country, a power for incalculable good in the newly welded world which every one of us knows must somehow be in the making.

The Home Sector is edited for the five million in the belief that they will want to hear some one talking to them in their own language, that from time to time they will want to hear echoes of the old tent and deck and barrack debates and news from the old haunts, both here and overseas. Through *The Home Sector* they can keep in touch with one another. They can keep in touch with their past, and above all with their future.

Their future! Rich and poor, lettered and unlettered, immigrant and First Families of Virginia, East and West, North and South, they were all pitched in together to make the greatest expedition in the history of the world. And now, though for most of them their own front gates have once again swung to behind them, they have a common denominator. They have in common a new interest in the country they have served. They have a stake in America. No longer mere idle heirs of a great estate built on the toil and sacrifice of their fathers, they have taken over that patrimony and added to it. Does an audience made up of red-chevron men seem a limited audience for a new weekly to address? Why, it is merely to climb on a soap-box and talk to the healthy manhood of this country.

THIS from our comrade Paul A. Strachan will probably make you grin a little:

Riverdale, Md.

The man I was in partnership with, on the Coast, was the owner of a stanch 48-footer, the *Battler*, and a rattling good fishing boat was she. Charley couldn't swim a stroke, and, to cap the climax (no pun intended), he was very, very bald-headed.

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In the Sound, near Olalla, Wash., he owned an 80-acre strip bordering the water-front.

AT LOW tide, on one occasion, we hauled the old boat up, he having decided to paint her and scrape her bottom. He got several cans of Marine paint, heavy copper stuff, and, as he was an inveterate blunderer, he proceeded to paint himself in a hole, after applying the brush to the sides, the pilot house and finally the deck space. Up for'ard, with about 10 foot beam, he painted 'round and 'round, till, suddenly, he surprisingly found that he had painted himself into a very narrow spot in the dead-center of the deck.

Meantime, time had passed, and it was then about 5.30 P.M. The tide comes in very suddenly there, and, although we thought we had plenty of clearance, she suddenly came in, with a good strong biff, bang, bowie! Gentlemen, hush! It canted that old boat over to an angle of 45 degrees. Charley had a two-gallon can of paint in his hand. When the deck flopped up, of course he lost his footing, and you can imagine the spectacle of a full-grown man, shooting across a slippery, painted deck and into the water, gathering all the paint to his bosom, so to speak, *en route*, and especially, hanging on to the can for dear life and thus managing to pour its whole contents down over his unprotected pate (his hat having blown off, first crack).

He plumped down into the water, and his two brothers and myself were so paralyzed at the suddenness of the thing that we could do no more than hold tight to stanchions and laugh our fool heads off. Up he came, for the first time, having managed, in some way, to get a corner of the can so fixed on his bean that he looked like a Court Jester to His Majesty, King Nep. We had laughed before, but, when he popped up, we literally exploded with mirth. He went down and came up again, and, this time, his brother, Frank, had wind enough to ask "Want any help, Charley?", to which the latter replied "Gug-gug-go to ——!" and, down he went again. We just had sense enough to realize his plight then, and, next time he came up, I threw him a line and we hauled him out and bailed the water outer his innards.

THE aftermath is even more humorous. The paint stuck to his face and head, giving him the appearance of some cloud effects on Puget Sound. His head, particularly on top, had received a generous dousing, and, what is more, the —— stuff refused to wash off, be scrubbed off, or even sandpapered, although liberal use was made, of all three methods. Now it was his custom to visit cabarets frequently, and, pursuant to habit, he unconsciously walked into the "American" the following Saturday night, and, after he got there, he remembered his pate and refused to remove his hat. After an argument with a waiter, he got up and left.

Ladies, whom he met on the streets, commented on his lack of courtesy. He was also a great booster in the Flynn Health Chautauqua, and, since he religiously practised what he called "Vegetarian-ism" (eating nice mild-cured salmon, howsumever, on the side, declaring that fish wasn't meat), he was booked for an address before the society. I'll never forget that night as long as I live.

In the first place, the chairman presiding was an elderly female whom, instinctively, as soon as you looked at, you'd hem and haw and expectantly wait for her to say, "And, in conclusion, my sisters. . . ."

WELL, anyhow, Charley sneaked up and sat down on the extreme back row, on the platform. (As he dealt in a business way with many of the members, he could not refuse to make his spiel.) After preliminary proceedings, during which he fidgeted and squirmed but still sat, with his hat on, the severe female at the desk arose and announced that Brother Westerman would deliver an address on "Lentils, Their Value as Food Units."

Charley half arose, then sat down again, cast a wild eye around for a possible means of escape, then, resignedly, he made his way, uncertainly, to the center of the stage, STILL WITH HIS HAT ON!

The Chairman looked at him, over her glasses, and pursed up her lips. I can not tell you with what mixed feelings I viewed that audience, for I knew they were in for either a surprise or a disappointment. Anyhow, he nervously cleared his throat and opened his mouth, when there was a sharp rap on the table, and the Lady Chairwoman suggested that "Brother Westerman come to order." He turned around, looked desperately at her and replied, "I'm in order!" and began again.

This time she positively glared at him (I realized then what Kipling meant by "the female of the species, etc.") and, louder, she said, "Would Brother Westerman please come to order AND REMOVE HIS HAT?"

Oh, boy, if I could only describe the conflicting emotions on that man's face! Since it's not in my power, Ill simply tell the finale. He replied again "I AM in order!" but the audience began to yell (the male and younger members at least) "Take it off! Take it off!"

Charley stood there, looking dumbly at them for a moment, then broke into a run for the rear exit. Just as he passed a fat man on one of the middle rows, that individual jumped up, grabbed his hat and snatched it from Westerman's head. Say, can you imagine the yell that went up?—PAUL A. STRACHAN.

OUR magazine has been read for nine years now and one of the things that should please all of us most is that there are so many who have been reading it since the first issue in October, 1910. And of these a large part seldom get more than a few numbers in any one place, for they do not stand still long at a time. Yet they make our magazine part of their regular program, and if they go where there are no magazines, they hunt for the missed issues when they get back. That is one of the reasons why it is so hard to find our magazine on the shelves of the second-hand dealers.

Have I ever told you that only three or four per cent. of our circulation is in

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ıbscriptions? And yet, at the times when ıe circulations of all magazines were falling ff hard due to general conditions, our ıagazine held its own better than almost ll the others. When a man joins us he enerally sticks. And I think it is quite ırgely due to the fact that our magazine ın't just a magazine but is more than that— kind of meeting-place for all of us who ke the same kinds of things in life, a meet-ıg-place that somehow brings us into a ort of fellowship among ourselves.

THAT, I judge, is why we have had to order a new supply of our Camp-Fire ıuttons. You haven't been writing for ıuttons just because you like the stories n a magazine but because you know that ıack of the magazine is this fellowship and hat the button is a means of helping you ecognize, when you happen to meet them, he others who belong to it, those whom you have heard at Camp-Fire or whose stories you have read or with whom you may have had an argument by letter over fire-arms or some Latin-American question or the Old West or some other discussion that has come up. And you are sure that, when you meet one of these men, he may be a very different kind from yourself but will just the same have certain interests in common with you and be worth meeting. He may be a physician or a brakeman, a sailor or a clerk, a college professor or one of our very own gentry of the wandering foot who may be anything else in the world besides. But you will have some things in common and will be glad to shake hands with each other, get acquainted and decide between yourselves just how far along the same road your common interests will carry you.

Those of you not yet familiar with our Camp-Fire buttons will find the data on our "Service Page" and learn that they carry nothing on their face except the number 71, which is obtained by assigning 1 to A, 2 to B, 3 to C and so on and then adding the numbers of the letters of the word "Camp-Fire."

WELL, I was talking about those of you who began with No. 1, Vol. I, and here is one of them. Like most of you, he "always reads 'Camp-Fire' first," as I would myself if I could pick it up off the stands without having read it before. Say, did you ever think of that little point? We here in the office, who are now Wade, Cox, Brace and Hoffman, and the compositors and proof-readers, are the only ones of all of us who can't ever pick up a copy of our magazine and carry it off for some hours of fresh reading. May be I shouldn't say it, but I call it sort of hard luck. Just as a reader I hunted a long time for something like our magazine when there wasn't any such thing, and then when it came into existence I had to be, by one chance out of many millions, one of the fellows who had to sit on the other side of the editorial desk and become unable to pick up a new copy and sit down to some new amusement the way the rest of you can. Well, if I'm ever fired I'll get that much out of it anyway, but I've lost nine years of it already. It may sound like tooting the magazine's horn, but it's true. Sympathize with me a bit and then I'll shut up and let this old-timer talk, an old-timer of only about thirty-one but with quite a bit to talk about just the same.

First saw the light of day in Colon, Panama, June 12, 1888. Father is Cavan County Irish. Mother is Muresco Spanish. (Both living). Lived on an English tramp of which dad was master and part owner. Visited every port of any importance from Petrograd to Rio and from Frisco to the ports of Japan and China, including the Philippines and Hawaiian Islands, Australia and New Zealand.

WENT to school in New Orleans and enlisted in U. S. Army and went to Ft. Wm. McKinley in the —— infantry. After time was out, enlisted in the U. S. Marines in Manila and was sent to Pekin and was a Legation Guard entire hitch. Discharged, came back to God's Country, enlisted in Coast Artillery, finished hitch there and took on four more in U. S. Navy, serving on a destroyer, one year as a gunner's mate after going through ordnance school, Newport, R. I. Later shanghaied to repair ship, then to transport fleet, made several trips to England, France and Italy (saw home of Christopher Columbus in Genoa.)

Transferred to 16-inch gun crew on navy gun mounted on railroad trucks, special design. Held this down until Armistice signed. No thrilling experiences in Navy except shooting up a Haitian town and starting an anti-native riot in Bocaroon, Cuba, during ship's stay in Guantanamo Bay.

TORPEDOED three times in North Sea; lay in freezing water nine hours off the Irish Coast. Had a young war with pro-German Irish in Queenstown, Ireland.

While on leave in Paris (December, 1917) traded uniforms with Highland soldier, fell overboard in Seine River while viewing a "Kultur-buzzard" brought down by French anti-air craft guns (Dec. 24th, 1917.) Also had the pleasure of testing machine-guns on rifle range, Guantanamo Bay,

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Cuba, in which I became familiar with Beut-Mercier (Volcano) Lewis, Browning (heavy and light), Colt, Vickers-Maxim; Browning being best in all ways and under all conditions.

Also hold expert marksman medals under old and new Army regulations, with Krag-Jorgensen and Springfield rifles, also with Colt .45 new service revolver and .45 automatic Colt pistol.

At present am radio operator with a first-grade preferred license, also hold a marine engineer's license, second assistant, salt water unlimited tonnage and horsepower.

THIS letter is rather disjointed, to say the least, but guess you can put it all together. Served as artificer, Q. M. sergeant, top-sergeant in infantry; Electrician and master gunner, Coast Artillery; ordnance sergeant or rather gunnery sergeant in the Marines. Served as Captain National Guard in 1914-15. Gunner's mate, special mechanic 1st class, U. S. Navy (obtained marine engineer's license while in U. S. N.) Have had numerous close calls and have been shot at several times but happened to be too good a runner. Have been shot on several occasons. Fell over the side in Japan and just escaped being a meal for shark. Fell into a pen of alligators. These were close shaves, but they only added spice to the sauce of life, so to speak.

Well, I have run my course, so I will spill my mud-hook and pay out a long cable.

With best regards to all of the friends of *Adventure* and Camp-Fire, both old and new.— —— ——.

WE'VE already had a "close up" of our old friend *Magpie Simpkins* and here is one of his old side-kick *Ike Harper*, which same we are glad to see looking so cheerful and so forgetful of the many rough times he has passed through since we first met him. The drawing, of course, is from the hand of W. C. Tuttle.

NOT a chance! Will I find me a fine big boiling kettle of trouble and then with my eyes open deliberately crawl into it? No matrimonial agency for this magazine. Go away. And no lady who thinks she fills the exacting requirements of the comrade who wrote the following letter need address any letter in our care to "——." It sure won't reach him. He's asking for it, of course, and I'd like to help him and probably it would be all right in this one case, but how about the other cases that would immediately come to the fore? Nothing doing.

Our old "Wanted" department, which had to be given up after several years because two or three people put it to wrong uses, would be absolutely trouble-proof in comparison with any kind of attempt at matrimonial negotiations through our magazine. Oh no, nothing doing in *that* line!

But it's an interesting problem this letter presents and one that has, I know, confronted a good many of you at one time or another. Here's the letter. But no ladies need apply.

Mare Island, Calif.

During the several years I've been reading *Adventure* a great diversity of topics have been discussed in Camp-Fire. But, providing this gets into print, I think I'm going to spring a new subject, new, at least to Camp-Fire.

I remember the department of expeditions and employment that used to appear in *Adventure*, until it was found impracticable. And it seems hardly probable that *Adventure* could conduct or would care to conduct, a matrimonial department, because it would fail for reasons similar to those that affected the expedition department.

In an article published in Camp-Fire by a friend of Jack London's, after London's death, it was stated that London's married life had proved that one afflicted (or blessed) with the wanderlust could be happily married and still not have to stifle the craving for adventure and action.

There are doubtless among the readers of Camp-Fire a great many persons, both male and female, who find themselves in the same predicament that assails me. The wanderlust spirit is strong in me. I'm only twenty-six years old, but I've been pretty much on the go since I was seventeen, and there is no diminishing of the desire. Just about equally strong is the desire for a mate. That is natural, of course. But up to the present time I haven't succeeded in finding a woman with whom I think I could be happy. That is because I haven't found a woman who cares to live as I do.

Certainly I do not expect to have everything my

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ay, but what I'm looking for is a woman who likes he outdoor life and who is willing to travel, whether y Pullman or horseback, steamer or canoe or, if eed be, do her thirty miles or better a day on foot. nd at the same time I would like her to be equally t home in a lumber camp or a ballroom, and able o eat beans from a tin plate or eat soup correctly. There are women who like to travel when there re no hardships attending, and there are women ho can stand the hardships but wouldn't know hat to do with an orange-wood stick. Surely there ust be a happy combination of the two. And rely there must be other people looking for a simi- r combination.

And so it occurs to me that if *Adventure* could de- se some method by which its readers might be- me acquainted that perhaps a great many people ight find a solution to similar problems.— ——.

HOW many more of you can claim membership in all three American Legions -the original one started by us of the Camp-ire in the Summer of 1914, the body of mericans at the front in the Canadian rvice before this country entered the war, nd the final and permanent American egion which is the new G. A. R. That a proud claim and very few men in the orld are entitled to make it, but just the me there are probably a few more of amp-Fire who have the honor.

Camp "A," Palmer, Oregon.

I have just been reading your article about the Three American Legions" and it suddenly dawned on me that I happen to be one of the fortunate es who can claim membership in all three of them. I was enrolled as a member of your American egion and then went to Canada and entered the anadian service, serving more than two years in every grade from private to captain, and then, too battered up for further use, was shipped back home, arriving in New York late in April, 1917. August 2, 1917, I was back in Uncle Sam's uniform (had had twenty years of it before) as a captain of a machine-gun outfit. Served as instructor in that branch and when the Small Arms Firing School was organized at Camp Perry went there as an instructor and remained until the closing of the school.

Tried many times to get back overseas but the "medicos" wouldn't stand for it.

Am now leading the simple life up on top of Larch Mountain and trying to learn something of the logging industry—one of the few things which I had overlooked during my twenty-five years of knocking around.

It may interest you to know that my identification-card No. 540 has been with me through a number of very strenuous years, including the Ypres, Somme and Arras campaigns.

If you happen to run across Edward Cave, kindly convey to him my good wishes and tell him that I am going to write him a letter some time.—HERBERT W. McBRIDE.

FROM John A. Lomax comes word that he has received interesting letters from some of you in response to the call for old chanteys and sea-ballads that have not yet been collected and preserved in print. Any more of you who know some of these old songs? If so, won't you write to Mr. Lomax, Y. M. C. A. Building, Austin, Texas?

THE suggestion of gradually establishing Camp-Fire "stations" all over the world has aroused enthusiasm and we'll surely have to work out a way to do it and do it right.—A. S. H.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

'O SEE ourselves as others see us is always a wholesome thing even if not always a pleasant ie. The following letter tells us how we look to a ber who is becoming an American by deliberate choice. I do not agree with all he says and probably you will not. But then we have not his outside point of view. We can see only from the inside.

It is certainly true that we fail to keep a rein on

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our officials after we elect them. We could. It is true that we brag a lot about our country without knowing the facts. Most of us really know little about our Constitution. Most of us are unable to tell an emigrant how or where to get naturalized and think little and do little about taking care of our melting-pot—don't know, indeed just what it is doing and failing to do. And we know our politics are dirty—and blame everybody but ourselves.

I AGREE with Mr. Harold in all these things and in some of the things he says about caste, but when he says we have already rejected plutocracy I can't follow him. The dollar still reigns nearly supreme and men's consciences and souls and brains and bodies are still secondary considerations. Plutocracy is not merely the rule of a few men with money; it is the attitude of mind in the people that makes such rule possible by worshipping the dollar above things more worth while. That is a truth that all the theories and dogmas of economics can not shake.

MATERIALISM. That is the blight at the root of our whole structure. We have gradually let ourselves become dominated by the point of view of the blind fools who can see in the world only material things, material factors, material forces, who are blissfully ignorant of the fact that all these things are only the pawns or tools of ideas and ideals and who never feel so wise and superior as when they are deriding "idealists" and "dreamers." But there is more brain activity even in dreaming than in sleeping with the mind a blank, and it has been the "unpractical" dreamers—Christ, Mohammed, Columbus and a million other preachers, adventurers, writers, artists, musicians and reformers —who have shaped the thought of the world and therefore the world itself.

Some day we shall realize that the lowest type of human intelligence is that which has only the ability to pile one dollar upon another and can contribute only this to the world's progress.

OH YES, I know the materialist's bright rejoinder —he reckons, by gosh, that if we aren't fed, clothed and housed we die and then what becomes of your blamed ideals? Being a materialist, that is as far as he can see. Somehow I always think of a materialist as a hen. A hen is a highly unintelligent creature that has no time or ability to "dream" and spends all its time pecking up material things so that it can lay eggs and raise chickens for others and be killed for market. And the hen is an eminent "success" in this particular line.

The chief difference between a hen and a human materialist is that people don't go to a hen for advice.

A. S. H.

New York

"ALL that we have and all that we are." Did President Wilson mean that in terms of dollars? No, you will answer indignantly. Then what did he mean? Do you know how all that you have and all that you are compares with what other nations have and are?

I have rarely met an American who knows. By American, I mean one born here. Any one raised abroad with the common sense to change his domicile for this country does not need to be told. But he never attempts to assist in the betterment of America with the benefit of his experience.

IF A foreigner ventures to criticize you, and your country, you promptly tell him in no uncertain way that America is good enough for you. But you are away off, there. America is not good enough for you. And mainly so because you are not good enough for America.

So, perhaps you are right after all, if your smart retort implies that your country is no better than you deserve. But I take it that you meant that if Mr. Foreigner does not like America, there is no one holding him here. But suppose that he knows, appreciates and loves your country and its institutions—all that you are and all that you have—better than you do; what then?

What do you know about your country? Do you know the Constitution of the United States by letter? Did you ever learn it at school? Anywhere? Forgotten it? If not, isn't it mighty good reading? I am not deafened by the mighty roar of one hundred million people yelling "yes" all at the same moment.

EVERY American I have met has had the nerve to compare the Constitution of the United States with those of other countries, whenever the conversation headed that way; I usually did the steering; and generally got him to admit without antagonizing him that what he was saying was not even "eagle-screaming" but savored rather of "polly."

In order to be able to converse intelligently on that subject there were a few simple things he should have known. One of these was the name of his borough councilman of his town. Did he ever go to a meeting of his town council to learn if his representative there was waging a gallant fight against those things that make America good enough for him, unsupported by a little, a very little, of that stimulant called public opinion?

AND yet this same citizen grumbles at his tax-bill. He pays because he knows argument is useless by the time he gets it. He did not go to see it in the making. He also pays because paying is so much simpler than investigating whys and wherefores. Having paid, does he make it his business to see how it is spent? Wastefully, economically? If the latter and there is a surplus, what becomes of that?

That is the point where good citizenship starts—interest in the doings of your local government. No meeting can be held to transact the business of your town at which you may not be present. And it does not matter a little bit whether you are a property owner or not; it is your business just the same. Also please note that if you live in rented property, you pay all the taxes on that property plus a profit; as well as your proportion of the rates and taxes on your landlord's home. The taxes are levied on his holdings and he passes them on to you.

Of course you are perfectly reasonable when you say that you can not follow your assemblyman to Albany, Des Moines, Baton Rouge or Sacramento. Also that you can not depend on the press for an unbiased report of what he does there. The press is a business enterprise that will give what you want and what you like best, not what is good for you.

YOU have already sized me up as a foreigner. Perhaps so. In eighteen months' time I will gladly forfeit that distinction. It took me a few days after I landed in America to locate the nearest

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uralization bureau. A foreigner steered me there. American could tell me. It did not interest , he said. No? Well, well! Not worth the able to find out if a melting-pot fitted with a lid uld melt better than a melting-pot wide open! Well, I am thankful that I nosed my way in, in e. The America I found was all that I had rd of her abroad, and more. How much more, m not prepared to say just at the moment. u might think I was joshing you—so easy to a urally modest people, when my real object is get you roaring, fighting mad.

O DECENT American will touch politics with a forty-foot pole. One bright Yankee said t the reason he would not seek election was the r that his wife might hear of the things his ponent would say about him. He had in mind string of criminal libel cases that clutter the endar after the elections. And the striking t the very few of them ever reach the courts. e pot is no blacker than the kettle.

But the same kettle and the same pot in the art enamel of silk hat and frock coat find their y just the same to the sideboard of Congress. ngress! Whew! But there, I do not want to t you any madder than I can help; and certainly t for the purpose of listening to myself. But u are beginning to agree with me that America not good enough for you. Also you are getting know whose fault it is.

N ORDER to be able to show you why I think so much of your country, notwithstanding the servations I have made, it may be necessary to fer a comparison with other countries. Not Asia, hich is not a country, but a condition of things. ot Africa, which has only just stepped out on the orld's stage, with her first "speaking part." ot Australia, because I am not competent to judge, ving never been there. So we may take Europe ith which you have so much and yet so little in mmon.

Europe is pretty much where she was a thousand ars ago. A system of caste—a number of planes different levels of social distinction and privileges, om that of the king, by easy stages, to dukes, lords, arons, knights; to esquires, freemen, churls, serfs, aves and villeins. And these distinctions exist o less definitely to-day than in the time of the Nor- an and the Plantagenet.

Aspiration to a higher plane is called snobbery nd fought with ridicule. Sometimes it takes the rm of revolt and is suppressed with violence. ut the system has the merit of preserving a sem- lance of order. No matter how any plane may spire to parity with the next degree above, it is olemnly charged with the duty of checking the mbitions of the plane below. This is true of re- ublics as well as empires, taking them by and large.

LET us compare this with America. To get the true slant, you must look through European glasses, as I have shown you Europe through American glasses. Europeans do not regard you as Americans at all. Just simply men and women of their own race and blood, who beat them to it by a generation or two. Beat them to what? Equal opportunity for all. America gives no less. She could not offer more.

But it has not yet percolated into their systems what you have accomplished without planes of caste or the privileges of heredity. They are unable to visualize your recognition of only one aristocracy—the aristocracy of labor; the man who does a day's work better than his fellows. Because they identify labor with servility; and work as a necessary evil.

They have not yet learned how you have already rejected the false standard of plutocracy; how decency patiently waited while vulgarity roared itself to a standstill; how cultured cheeks flamed with indignation when the columns of the newspaper told how far so-and-so's dollars would reach if placed end to end; knowing that America was being sized up according to these standards by cultured people of other lands.

They have not yet grasped the fact that you have an appreciation of literature, music, art, refinement, because your ancestors were squeezed out of the lowlier planes of European civilization by pressure from above. Too great is the mental effort required to imagine that you can be rich without wanting to be idle; that you can work without coveting wealth. From the abyss of their hopelessness, they can not appraise all that you have and all that you are.

BUT you will say that these things will change after the war. Will the war change Prussia? Did the fall of the Bastille change the grades of the French to any extent? Did the Magna Charta or Cromwell do anything to liberate the English people? You know yourselves that Cromwell was dead over a century in 1776, when you were an English people.

All that was ever learned from upheavals in Europe was learned by the patricians, the junkers, and the Bourbons. Insurrection and civil war taught them to go more carefully, that's all. In the shuffling of the cards after the last game they were stacked for the next deal. The rank and file learned nothing; gained nothing. What will they gain now? What will the War in Europe teach you?

LET us compare once more. The Destroying Angel has left the mark of his sword on every hearth and altar of Europe. The agony of bereavement has paralyzed their very souls and drugged every hope or thought for the future. They only wish to be allowed to glide down to the end of the stream of life in peace, in utter disregard of the brand new styles of political garments tailored in Paris.

With you it is different. The force of the blow was spent when it reached you. It did little more than scatter the chessmen on the board. The power that took millions of you from your jobs to put you into the army was incompetent to take you out of the army to put you into your jobs. It takes more than high-handed action to accomplish that. And high-handed action was necessary; for it was a war of machine against machine, system against system, conscription against draft.

Your nation was founded on the mistakes of Europe. Once more they have startled you out of your sleepy complacency. The Book is open wide again for you to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest. Will you?

JOHN J. HAROLD.

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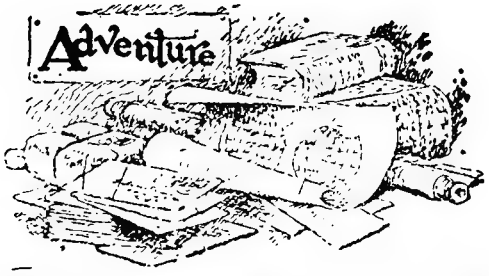

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Dutch, Portuguese, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

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A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying*.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL SELL: Feb. to Dec., 1914 (inclusive); Jan. to Apr., 1915 (inclusive); Nov. and Dec., 1915; Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., 1916; March and July 1917; Sept., Oct., Nov., 1918; First Jan., Mid-Jan., First Feb., Mid-March, Mid-April, First May, Mid-May, First June, Mid-June, Mid-July, First Aug., Mid-Aug., 1919. Twenty cents per copy, express collect.—LEN FLEMING, Wellsboro, Pa.

WILL SELL: Aug., 1913; Aug., 1914; Aug., 1915; June, 1917; First Jan., 1918; First July, First Aug., Mid-Aug., First Sept., First Oct., Mid-Oct., First Nov., Mid-Nov., First Dec., 1918.—FRED F. MCGUDER, 1511 Sixth St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

WILL BUY: First Jan., Mid-Mar., First Apr., First May, Mid-May, First June, Mid-June, First July, 1919; Mid-Mar., 1918.—FRED F. MCGUDER, 1511 Sixth St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

WILL BUY: June, 1913. Please state price.—R. F. MCCALEB, 261 Broadway, New York City.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn in lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, postpaid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1833 S St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1309 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, P. O. Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Western U. S. Part 1
E.E.HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

10. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1
J. B. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

11. Mexico Part 2 Southern
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and MacDougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

12. North American Snow Countries Part 1
R. S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Minnesota and Wisconsin. Hunting, fishing, trapping; canoes and snowshoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

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Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors, or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 3
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., covering south-eastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 4
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 5
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 6
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries. Part 7
H. S. BELCHER, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

20. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and MacDougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

21. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and MacDougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

22. South America. Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, The Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

23. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

24. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNER, Box 807A.—R. F. D. No. 10, Los Angeles, California. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports; manufacturing.

25. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history; geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

26. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

27. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Eagle Bird Mine, Washington, Nevada Co., Calif. —Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

28. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

29. ★ Africa Part 3 Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunno, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

30. ★ Africa Part 4 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo.
CHARLES BEADLE, 7 Place de Tertre, Paris, XVIII, France. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

31. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

32. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen. Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

The following "Ask Adventure" editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Major A. M. Lochwitzky.

Yucatan

THIS vast, little-known part of southern Mexico still seems to prosper, and is yearly attracting more and more adventurous spirits to its coral shores. Please note, however, that Mr. Whiteaker now covers Northern Mexico, and Mr. Young Southern Mexico:

Question:—"I am interested in Yucatan, Mexico. Can you give me some information on that country as to climate, industries, living conditions, etc.? Are there any large railroad companies there?

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Is the country prosperous? Is it revolution-ridden like the other parts of Mexico? Also give me some information about the city of Merida.

I am 26 years of age, have a good education, have had ten years of mercantile and clerical experience, and in a position to furnish the finest of references as to character, ability, morals, etc. Do you think it is possible for me to secure profitable employment there in my line at the present time? Does one have to go through any difficult or bothersome Government red tape in order to enter that country?"—CHAS. L. BORDEN, Tela, Honduras, C. A.

Answer, by Mr. Whiteaker:—The Gulf State of Yucatan in the Peninsula of the same name (which includes Territorio Roo) with a total area of 91,201 square kilom. and a population of 315,000, is the greatest *henequén*-producing region of the world and one of the most interesting of the Mexican possessions.

It is bounded on the north by the Gulf of Mexico, on the east by the Caribbean Sea, on the south by British Honduras and the Republic of Guatemala, and on the west by Campeche, which once formed a part of it.

The peninsula is an immense plain which, starting from the coast line, rises toward the interior to a height of about 200 feet. In the northwest the soil is of a dry, calcareous and rocky formation; It was sterile until the exploitation of *henequén* transformed it into one of the richest regions (financially) of the republic.

The fertility of the land increases toward the northeast and the southern region abounds in virgin forests of valuable dye and cabinet woods, and in stretches of land suitable for the culture of all kinds of vegetables. This is also the home of the Yucatan turkey, the most beautiful of the turkey family—also the venerated *Quetzal*, the Mexican bird of paradise, noted for its beautiful plumage, is found here.

The peculiarity of Yucatan is the absence of surface rivers. Underground streams exist and drinking water is obtained from wells sunk to connect with them. The entire peninsula is one large table of coral formation, beneath the surface of which the streams are found.

The Indians, centuries ago, marked the course of these subterranean streams by heaps of stones, and their cities were always built near the water-caves, as is now shown by their ruins. The caves where the rivers appear to the light of day are called *cenotes*. There are many in Yucatan and they form one of the natural curiosities of the country. They are used as wells and bathing places. In Merida they lie from 20 to 40 feet below the surface and many of the houses have pumps connected with them.

The most important industry in Yucatan is the production and exportation of the fiber of the *Agave Sisalense*, called also *Henequén*. It is a very profitable business—there are more than 400 plantations in the peninsula.

Yucatan is noted for its splendid hammocks, which are usually long and wide and made of the finest sacci fiber. They bear the same relation to Yucatan that fine hats do to Panama.

Progreso, chief port of entry of the Yucatan Peninsula, with 5,200 inhabitants, is noted for the great quantity of *henequén* which annually passes through it outward bound. The light from the lighthouse is seen 31 miles away. There is an astronomical observatory there. The American colony, a mile or so down the beach, is the resort of many Progreso and Merida residents. Fishing is the chief industry of the port and from here the markets of Merida and the interior towns are supplied. The sea swarms with fish, among which are huge man-eating sharks.

Merida (25 feet above the sea-level, population 44,000), capital of the Yucatan Peninsula, one of the richest and most interesting of the Mexican cities, was founded in 1542 by Don Francisco Montejo (the younger) on the site of the ancient Maya metropolis of Tihoo.

The *calles* are fairly broad and paved with asphalt or bricks and cross each other at right angles. They are usually numbered instead of named, making it very confusing to a stranger. Of the many public squares the most attractive is the plaza de la Republica (P. I. c. 3).

The business life of the city centers in the vicinity of the *calle* 65. The private life is focussed according to the Spanish-Moorish custom, in the inner courts of the houses, which are very attractive.

Merida is a wealthy city and many of the homes are very luxurious. The annual carnival, usually celebrated in March, is a time of great rejoicing.

The climate of Merida is hot but healthy. The intense heat of midday is often tempered by the sea breeze which sometimes blows for days.

The months (March and April) which precede the rainy season are apt to be very trying to the unacclimated. The temperature throughout the year ranges from 75 degrees to 98 degrees Fahr.

The cathedral, completed in 1598 at a cost of $300,000, besides being the richest, largest and handsomest in the peninsula, is the most attractive building in Merida.

There are several banks where money can be exchanged. Express Com. where English is spoken, American, British, French, etc., consuls—for street address see local directory—tramways and several railroads.

The customs inspection on the wharf is usually rapid, courteous and lenient. Get all information possible from the ship's purser before disembarking.

Can not say how the country is just at present, whether they are having trouble or not. Find out from some one who has recently been there. Or can you not get what you want to know from papers?

You seem well equipped to secure a position most any place, I should think, and hope you succeed.

Isles of the South Seas

EVER alluring, these palm-covered pearls of the Pacific attract young, two-fisted adventurers as a magnet draws a needle. There is wealth in the islands, too, if one keeps his head; the climate is ideal, and otherwise; things sprout and ripen with incredible speed; but let Mr. Mills tell it. He lives there and knows:

Question:—"I am after general information regarding the Pacific Islands, particularly Rarotonga and Tahiti with a view to settling there. I am a mechanical draughtsman—married, my wife being a trained nurse—and in the course of my training

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have had many years of practical experience as a mechanic—engineering, building and boat-building, and also as a deep-sea sailor, and have a N. Z. coastal-water's ticket.

Am anxious to get away from the above callings and would like to try my hand at growing cocoanuts and the like. I would therefore like to know the following:

What immediate opportunities are there in my present line of business, particularly among the boats? Can do almost anything on a boat.

On what terms, price and by whom is land suitable for above named cultivation available and what area is necessary for a comfortable living? Where do you advise?

What accommodation is available, hotels excluded, such as vacant house or native hut?

Is there any game or animal shooting there? What are the natives like? Are the islands healthy, and what is the maximum temperature? Is the climate trying? What is the cost of living there?

And last but not least what scope is there for real adventure—dare-devil or otherwise?"—H. J. B., Coronation Bay, Como, N. S. W.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—I should say there are numerous opportunities to make your way among the islands, especially as the motor method is becoming popular. Crews are often augmented in the islands. Most of the land in the islands is held on the communistic system—that is, it is held by the natives, for the natives. Small areas may be leased from the local authorities. I can not give you prices, and the necessary area depends upon local conditions. In your case I would advise a letter to your Minister of Internal Affairs, Melbourne, asking his department for prospects of taking up land in New Guinea or the New Hebrides.

As a fair amount of tourist traffic goes through the best-known part of the islands there are accommodation houses, for which reasonable tariff prevails. In out-of-the-way islands the natives are hospitable and they will put you up. Your wife's qualifications as a nurse will be found worth while in your travels.

Oh, yes, there are pests in plenty in the islands—snakes, ants galore, abnormal spiders, centipedes, bats, and other creepy, crawly things peculiar to the different groups. There is no big game in the islands, but pigeons and other birds, with wild pigs and dogs for a change, will keep a light sporting gun in exercise.

The natives differ. In some groups they still have all the instincts of the savage. In New Guinea, in from the coast, there are cannibals. There are parts of the New Hebrides, too, where the white man is not yet welcome. But generally the South Sea Islander is good-natured and friendly. There are parts of the South Seas that are as healthy as any other part of the world—and other parts as feverish as swamps and the tropics can make them.

Stick to the coast line on the big islands, and it will be healthy. The heat is no greater than in your own town during the summer season, nor is the climate, generally speaking, any more trying. What is the maximum of Como? It does not go any higher any oftener in the South Seas. The cost of living is the eighth wonder of the world—in the islands, as in Sydney, New York, and London. It is cheaper to die, but certainly no dearer to live in Suva than in Sydney.

Adventures are to the adventurous. I've known men to meet up with more dare-devil risks and adventures in Sydney than in any cruise in the islands. On the other hand, a cruise through the islands is full of the unusual; and, if you want sensation, try shark-fishing. If you want to dodge danger, stay outdoors at night. There is a vast difference between Rarotonga (British) and Tahiti (French). Leave the latter alone.

If you are serious concerning the Cook Islands, write for specific information regarding settlement, etc., to Mr. S. Russell, Hon. Sec., Cook Island Progressive Ass'n, Rarotonga. I am enclosing a separate answer for your friend.

Arizona

THIS high-speed description of our great desert state gives a general idea of what one can expect who goes there. Mr. Harriman will gladly give specific answers to any and all, if only they will ask *definite* questions.

Question:—"Kindly send me information about Arizona. Is it a great cattle raising state? How about the hunting and lumbering?"—G. W. K., Ft. Logan, Colorado.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—Arizona had 204,000 inhabitants in 1910, has 112,920 square miles of land surface, one hundred of water, divided into fourteen counties, is commonly called The Place God Forgot, or else God's Dumping Ground and The Devil's Pasture. Has many thousands of acres of desert land, alkali till you can't rest, about 30,000 Indians, 1,200 Chinks and half as many Japs; is a great cattle state, with almost one million head assessed last year. Is about the highest mineralized state in the union, with gold, silver, copper, tungsten, manganese, lead, quicksilver, molybdenite, gypsum, etc., in great deposits.

Raises the finest cattle imaginable and the best class of men. Is a land where the bluff won't work worth a cuss, but any man with the real stuff can always get a hearing and a helping hand. It has some fine timber land in the Tonto Basin, in the Kaibab Forest of Coconino County, in the mountains around Flagstaff and other places. It is a state where they hate a four-flusher and love a real he man, where they take a man for what he is, not what his father was.

It abounds in cactus, rocks, sidewinders, chuckwallas and coyotes.

It is a state where more lungers have come staggering and gone out well and strong than any other I know. It holds some of the toughest propositions that ever flipped a six-gun and thousands of the best-behaved, law-abiding citizens on earth. It has developed some of the best men now living, from a gosh-danged discouraging start. I don't know how they do it, but Arizonians have a way of tapping the best there is in a man and making that part grow fastest.

Arizona has one of the greatest irrigation projects ever built. The Roosevelt Dam has turned thousands of acres of raw desert into veritable gardens that are making their owners rich. It has the best petrified forest in the world at Holbrook, the grandest scenic marvel in the Grand Cañon,

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the oldest ruins in the prehistoric cliff dwellings and the Casa Grande. It abounds in game, such as deer, wild turkeys, quail, grouse, rabbits, etc. Along the border are many wild hogs called the javalinas, pronounced havaleenas. Also, plenty of Mexican bandits.

Up in the Apache National Forest are trout streams where the trout grow big and ferocious.

The New vs. the Old in China

FEW realize the tremendous awakening which has shaken four hundred millions of yellow men to life. The dawn seems to have come for China. With her immense resources, her vast country, her unlimited man-power, can any one deny that she is soon to be a world-power? Perhaps one day *the* world power.

Question:—"I am writing this wondering if you would give me some information in regard to China, in the way of customs and natural history?

I am a member of a club with a Chinese name, and just recently we have started to give dances. This information I would like to help us get up some original ideas on our invitations and programs. If you have anything of interest along this line it would sure be appreciated."—R. L. COON, Denver, Colorado.

Answer, by Mr. Halton:—I am afraid that it would be impossible in the compass of a letter to tell you of the customs and natural history of China. The changes in China have been very rapid during the last ten years. The mainspring of Chinese official life—its unique educational system—is being remodeled throughout the country. The examination halls of bygone ages, where generations have sat for the competitive examinations, have been taken down and in their place normal schools have been erected. The Confucian classics are being ousted, their place being taken by modern textbooks of knowledge and science.

The antiquated modes of travel are being changed. The new and the old are still to be seen together. First came the fine American river steamers on the Canton River and the Yangtse, and ocean-going steamers navigated the Chinese seas as soon, or even before, that. These are manned entirely by Chinese and they are being built and engined by Chinese firms. Alongside these in the rivers are still to be seen the imitation stern-wheeler in the tread-mill, man-driven passage boats.

The streets in most of the cities are still very narrow for the use of jinrickshas, but they are gradually being widened for the use of motor-cars, particularly in the so-called treaty ports.

Railroads are being constructed and wherever introduced are widely patronized by the Chinamen. Electric plants are cropping up every day and gas is freely used in the cities.

As regards natural history: China extends from 20 north to 50 north and from 75 to 130 east. You can find the same conditions obtaining as in North America from Mexico to the Canadian Line.

For more detailed information can refer you to "Things Chinese," by J. Dyer Ball, which can be obtained from Kelley & Walsh, Hongkong. The cost is about ten dollars Hongkong currency.

Ontario for Farming

BACK to the land is a cry now running through our crowded East. Shall it be North or South or West? Ontario offers great opportunities to work either for others, or make a home for yourself.

Question:—"Will you kindly give me information in regards to homstead land in Ontario? Or tell me where I can write and obtain such.

I am twenty-three years old, just discharged from U. S. Army. Is there also a chance to work during harvest time in the wheat country?"—ALBERT U. SHUBRICK, Akron, O.

Answer, by Mr. Catton:—Write H. A. Macdonell, Director of Colonization, Toronto, for full particulars regarding homestead lands in Ontario, or to the Director of Colonization of any province in Canada in which you wish to locate. A few extracts from "Acquiring a Title to Public Lands in Ontario" is the best I can do in the limited space of a letter:

"Public lands which have been surveyed and are considered suitable for settlement and cultivation, and not valuable chiefly for minerals or pine timber, may be appropriated as Free Grants; and such lands may be located in any of the districts comprising Northern Ontario, except Timiskaming.

"With few exceptions, all the Free Grants townships in Northern Ontario, proper, are subdivided into sections and quarter sections, or into lots of 160 or 320 acres each, and the locatee, whether he be a single man over eighteen, or the head of a family with children, is entitled to 160 acres only, and the head of a family may purchase an additional 80 acres at the rate of 50 cents an acre, cash.

"In St. Joseph's Island, and in the Townships of Paipoonge in Thunder Bay and Cameron, Papineau, Calvin, Bonfield and Ferris in Nipissing, and in Free Grant territory south of the French and the Mattawan rivers, where lots are divided into 100 acres each, the male head of a family or the sole female head of a family, having a child or children under eighteen years of age residing with him or her, may be located for 200 acres as a Free Grant; and the head of a family may also purchase an additional 100 acres at the rate of 50 cents per acre, cash.

"An applicant, not the head of a family, may obtain free 200 acres by swearing off rock and swamp to the extent of 100 acres."

There certainly is a chance for work in the wheat fields in Canada, especially in harvest. Wages in the wheat harvest fields of the western provinces, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, particularly, run from three and a half dollars to five dollars a day and board, and if you get there when the cutting first begins you are absolutely sure of from two to four months work. And there is plenty of farm work to be had right here in Ontario in the Summer."

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Trapping Great Slave Lake

TRAPPERS must follow the fur if they want a profitable catch. Mr. Carson tells of an almost virgin land that should appeal strongly to those who market pelts; also of another territory where one can more than break even with his trap-line. Incidentally, a corking place for a north-woods vacation.

Question:—"I would like information about a trapping trip around Great Slave Lake.

"My partner and I do not expect to get rich. We want to go as a vacation, with the hope of making expenses. We have trapped around here, but only for skunks and muskrats.

"Can you give us a good map of the territory in question?. How much money would we need? Do you think it advisable for two fellows 22 years old, to take such a trip?"—EDWARD SIERMAN, New London, Conn.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—The map you speak of might be obtained from the Department of Interior, Ottawa, Canada. I may warn you however that this country has been only looked at, so to speak, not surveyed, and that any map you may get should not be considered as absolutely reliable.

Five hundred dollars each should be enough to stake you to a year's trip and you should get enough fur to stake you to another. I figure that in the event of putting a thousand dollars into the venture you stand more than an even chance of getting your money back.

I would not recommend the Great Slave country for your first attempt. It is too different from the Connecticut River. What I mean is that you would be too far out in the event of disaster to make it back to where help could be obtained. Again I do not think it is any better trapping district than may be found between Peace River Landing and Fort Vermillion.

Here are some of the advantages of the Peace River trip. A hundred dollars would put you in Peace River Landing by way of Edmonton. From what I can learn you could get work there at fair wages in the event of the grub stake getting gaunt. When you had enough for expense money you could take a canoe and drift down to Fort Vermillion, 250 miles of easy going and gentle current. There are numerous side trips at the Carkajo and Notekewin where you could leave the main stream. You could talk with the settlers and others and learn where there was a trapping line easy of access and promising a fair return. The fishing is poor in the Peace but the tributaries are all to the good and the small game very plentiful. When Vermillion was reached a few days' work would give you stake enough to pay your way back on the Thomas. You would thus escape a long, weary task of paddling upstream back to the Landing. You might also take a trip in the other direction, that is, up-stream to the Cañon where the Peace breaks through the Rocky Mountains. A steamer runs up to Hudson's Hope, 230 miles, and you could ride up-stream on the steamer and come back with your canoe.

Taking it all around I believe the Peace has more to offer for the five or more months of really good weather than anywhere else I know of. During June and July there is scarcely any night owing to the latitude, and while the hours during which the sun is below the horizon are cool they are nevertheless delightful.

I might also add that you will find a spirit of friendliness there that will probably surprise you Any assistance in the way of advice or direction is freely given and hospitality is the rule.

A trapper's license for a non-resident costs twenty-five dollars in Alberta, while in British Columbia no licenses are issued except to bona fide residents. Certainly I consider it advisable to take the trip. By exercising ordinary intelligence the risk is nothing to fear while the experience is well worth the effort.

Wealth in Western Australia

THIS is the land for red-blooded men to tackle. It offers gold to the prospector, timber to the lumberman, good wages to any one not afraid of hard work. Best of all, it is a new country, which means you can get in "on the ground floor."

Question:—"I want to go to Western Australia when discharged. Is there a chance for a young fellow in prospecting or for getting hold of timber lands?

Are the wages reasonable around the mines?

Does the state help mining men?

I understand there are vast resources of minerals in West Australia that have not been discovered yet.

Would it be possible to work my way over on a boat from 'Frisco? If so, could you give me address? How long is the sea trip?

The Australians are about the same as Americans and Canadians, are they not?"—C. H. EUSLEY, U. S. Naval Hospital, Puget Sound, Wash.

Answer, by Mr. Goldie:—I do not think you could do better than to go to Western Australia which is one of the richest states of the Commonwealth and has unlimited possibilities. Until the latter part of the '90s Western Australia suffered a long attack of arrested development, owing to the fact that a group of conservatives of the old English school conducted the state on the principle of keeping a good thing to themselves. Then in the '90s the great gold discovery of Coolgardie was made and it suddenly became manifest that the northern part of the state was a vast unexploited gold field. People rushed there from all parts of Australia, and in fact from all parts of the world, and very soon Coolgardie became a thriving mining town. In a few years, however, the principal activities shifted to what is now known as Kalgoorlie and the Great Boulder which are still thriving centers of industry. There is no telling what this state may yet reveal in the way of mineral wealth, as many believe that the immense amount of gold already produced in that section is only an indication of its total wealth.

With the acquisition of a number of good red-blooded men, Western Australia has prospered greatly in recent years and the labor party which has held power in politics for some time past have seen that the miners were well cared for. I think you would find conditions entirely favorable so far as wages are concerned; and as to your chances of success in prospecting, all I can say is that there is

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o doubt that the gold is there if you can find it. As to the timber industry, I might say that there e some fine forest lands in Western Australia. he principal timber products are kauri and jarrah, ir which there is a big demand in the eastern ates, where timber is not at all plentiful. No oubt you could secure good timber lands, as the overnment is very liberal to new settlers.

Your surmise that Australians are about the same s Americans and Canadians is quite correct and ou will find a ready welcome from the people of e east who are extremely hospitable and helpful. s to working your way there, the best plan would e to write to the manager of the Oceanic Steamip Company, San Francisco, and also to the manger of the Union Steamship Company, San Francsco. The trip across to Sydney takes from three four weeks, and from Sydney to Perth, about ven days.

Hunting the Grizzly

IF YOU would hunt the king of North American beasts, you must travel far. But the sport is peerless, and is there a man who, having brought down his first grizzly, will not say——

"The game is worth the effort!"

Question:—"Will you kindly advise me at your earliest convenience where you would suggest as the best place in British Columbia for grizzly bear hunting?

Two of us are planning a trip into B. C. and will go in by the way of Edmonton.

Would McBride be a good place to outfit from, or can we secure a guide there who has the necessary outfit and pack horses?

When would be the best time to go, and could we make arrangements by mail to get a reservation of time and outfit?"—JAMES F. KING, Sheridan, Wyoming.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—With the tide of immigration flowing so strongly and so erratically into the new countries it is impossible to state after an absence of a year or two just where the good hunting now is and where it has not been spoiled by the ubiquitous nester. The Stikine River above Glenora is still good and will be for years, but it is rather far away. This district is reached from Wrangel by river boats and there are outfits and guides to be had at Glenora, once known as Telegraph Creek.

Lillooet also has something to offer, while the fur report from Fort St. John lists 32 bears for the season's catch. I would suggest that you write the Provincial Game Warden, Edmonton, Alberta and get his opinion on the Peace River country, as he is in touch with the guides and can give you later and more reliable data than a man who has not been on the ground recently.

September is the right time of the year to go in. The flies have ceased troubling and the weather is just right.

Should you decide to try the Stikine, which in my opinion is a sure-thing bet, a letter to Hyland & Co., Glenora, B. C., will secure guides for you and all the necessary outfit at very reasonable rates. Wrangel is reached by boat either from Seattle or Vancouver.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

TURNER, GEORGE. Old time partner of "Pale Face Charlie." Last heard of in Round Mt., Nevada. Write to old friends—"CAIN" THOMPSON and JACK HOFFMAN, Deming, New Mexico.

BIECHELE, HARRY. Parents grieving over you. Come home or write. Was in Chicago when last heard from, seven years ago. Medium height, brown hair, thirty-five years of age. Ends of two fingers cut off.—Address EDNA BIECHELE, Sag Harbor, L. I., N. Y.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SWEECK, JOSEPH E. Last heard of on Pacific Coast, July, 1917. Any information concerning him will be appreciated.—Address THOS. E. LONG, Navy Yard Bldg. 10, Charleston, S. C.

RUTHERFORD, WILLIAM. Brother. Was placed in an orphan asylum in Brooklyn or New York in 1880. Was supposed to have been sent later to Rondout, N. Y. Any information will be appreciated.—Address FREDERICK RUTHERFORD, 120 Florist Street, Phila., Pa.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

STINER, N. L. "Slim." Last heard of in Franklin, Neb. Please write your old friend Harry—important. —Address HARRY PARMENTER, Stockton, Kansas.

ATKINS, WARREN. Please write, have good news.—Address L. GUGELLER, 341 Arkansas Street, San Francisco, Calif., care of WM. EAGAN.

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[illegible] lieutenant, 1st [illegible] nation will be [illegible] *Adventure.*

[illegible] **have found** [illegible] man.

[illegible] E. F. Any [illegible] appreciated.

[illegible] New Jersey [illegible] his where- [illegible] No. 378 care [illegible]

VAN WASSEL, CHARLEY. Lived in Philadelphia, also in New York City. Brother, Willy, born in West Indies. Age about forty-eight. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address WILLIAM WILLIAMS, 840 East 20th Ave., Denver, Colo.

ROYCROFT, LLOYD, C. Brother. Formerly a Marine aboard the U. S. S. *Maryland*, 1910—1913, at Pacific Station. Age thirty. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address CLAUDE B. ROYCROFT, 394 Simpson Street, Portland, Oregon.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

ROYCROFT, SYDNEY LYNN. Brother. Known as "Fuller". Last heard of at Vancouver Barracks, Washington in 1917. Enlisted in the U. S. Air Service and was sent to Fort Worth, Texas. Age twenty-four. Any information will be appreciated.—Address CLAUDE B. ROYCROFT, 394 Simpson Street, Portland, Oregon.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the Mid-September or First October issues of Adventure. They can get name of the inquirer from this magazine:

ALELIUNAS, Alex.; Austell, Percy W.; Bartlett, Geo. H.; Breeze, Lieut. Sidney, V. C.; Burrill Grammar School Girls and Boys; Clayton, Frank; Cooke, Harry Malcolm; Duncan, Ed. and Ellis; Duringer, Allan A.; Echols, Lon; Fiock, Forrest Thurman; Flattery, Michael A.; Gale, David J.; Gaskill, L. B.; Gordon, Mrs. Aaron; Hall, Will G. E.; Johnson, J. H.; Joynt, Harry; Kelly, Robert E.; Kelley, Wynnie; Law, Francis Gordon; McDonald, James; McGrath, Pvt. Thos. Edward; Neiger, B.; Nuckles, Fritz; Ohlson, O. S.; Parker, Jos. S.; Philip, Frank; Relatives of Maxmillian, Louis Knotte; Smith, Dr. Hulbert S.; Spiers, John; Thomas, Herbert Jerome; Franklin, Eugene; Karstead, Mrs. Frank; Tucker, Frances O.; Willman, Wm. J.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Lieutenant Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Bennett; Bryon Chrisholm.; A. B. Paradis; E. E. S. Atkins.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity:

ARNOLD, TED; Aspinartos, A.; Brady, Grover C.; Brison, Clarence F.; Bishop, L. O.; Benson, E. W.; Babcock, Lucius A.; Beaton, G. M.; Carr, Mrs. Fred; Cosby, Arthur F.; Collins, John; Coles, Bobby; Campbell, Frank U.; Dorr, H. S.; Engelby, B.; Geers, Mrs.; Harvey, Ted; Hines, Joseph; Harris, Walter J.; J. C. H.; Hart, Jack; Harding, James; Harrison, Tillson L.; Hunt, Dan'l O'Connel; Johnson, Walter R.; Kuckaby, William; Kohn, Edward Lee, Wm. R.; Lofler, Mrs. Harry; Leighton, Capt.; Larsen, Jack; Lee, C.; "Lonely Jock"; MacDonald, Donald Carr; MacMahon, J. A.; Macnarnee, Alva I.; Miller, B. J.; Morrisy, K. A.; McCord, P. A.; Maples, C. M.; McGraw, John; Nelson, Frank Lovell; Nichols, Leon; Norman, Cook William; Richards, Lewis S.; Reid, Raymond; Rodgers, Stewart; Reed, H. W.; Schmidt, Walter; Scott, James F.; Seaman, W. E.; Shephard, H. O.; Stanley, Jack; Swan, George; Taylor, Jim; Von Gelucke, Byron; Wetherell, Delos, E.; Williams, Bertram I.; Williams, Ray; Williams, W. P.; Western, S. S.; Yelton, Roy T.; Young, Leon.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address E. F. BRACE, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD
FIRST NOVEMBER NUMBER

Here are eight of the ten rattling good stories *Adventure* brings to you next issue. The others are listed on the second page.

THE SKULL OF SHIRZAD MIR — ***By H. A. Lamb***
A tale thrilling with the fatalism and mystery of seventeenth-century India.

LYNCH LAWYERS. A Five-Part Story. Conclusion — ***By William Patterson White***
In which *Red Kane* is an unwelcome visitor at Flipup, Colorado.

DEATH'S CARPENTER — ***By J. Allan Dunn***
Dr. Emerson, endangered by the superstitions of the natives of the New Hebrides, uses that same superstition and unflinching courage to fight for the life of a friend.

SILVER SYCEES — ***By Robert J. Pearsall***
Chang Pei Ying receives the suicide cord from his masters at Peking, but the quick thinking of a young American discovers the history of that cord and other interesting mysteries.

NO EVIDENCE — ***By Patrick L. Greene***
In darkest Africa diamonds are not easy to get, even with the aid of a machine-gun.

THE WOOING OF PLACIDE DUMAINE — ***By Hermann B. Deutsch***
A Louisiana oysterman discovers a novel means of combating the brute force of his powerful rival.

PLAIN BLANKET INDIAN — ***By E. S. Pladwell***
A Western real estate agent tries to do business with an Indian and discovers why that race has always been considered stoical. The agent had no sense of humor, but if you have, you will enjoy the story.

A GAME OF GET EVEN. A Complete Novelette — ***By Norman Springer***
A story of ships and the men that sail them.

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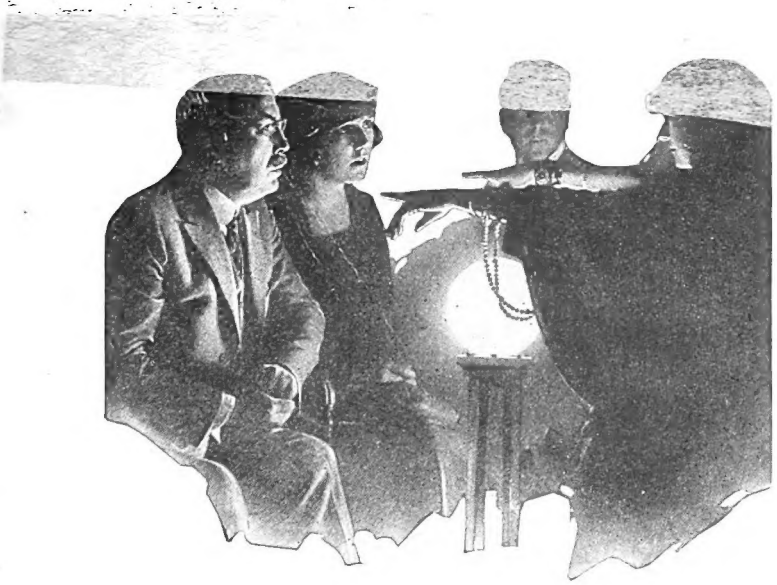

"One of These Is Guilty!"

"I see gold—masses of it—shining—glittering. There are two who are fighting for it—a man and a woman. One of them is a thief. There is only one other who knows the truth, and she is long since dead. If I can talk with her spirit——"

The mystery—the romance—the gripping horror of it all makes a story it is impossible to put down until the breathless end. Read it. It's in this set by

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He was at the Boer War—he was in Cuba—he saw the Russo-Japanese War—he was in Mexico—he was in the Great War. More than ever before Americans love him. His chivalrous knighthood stood out startlingly in this machine-made age.

He was the greatest war correspondent this world has ever seen. He knew how to seek adventure—he knew where to find it.

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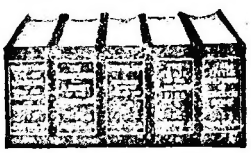

The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come — **Crittenden**
The Trail of the Lonesome Pine — **The Kentuckians**
Christmas Eve on Lonesome

Across John Fox's stories sweep the winds of the Kentucky mountains. Stark and aloof they stand—a massive fateful background for the passion and romance—the hate and the love that make his stories so rich in feeling—so distinctive in beauty.

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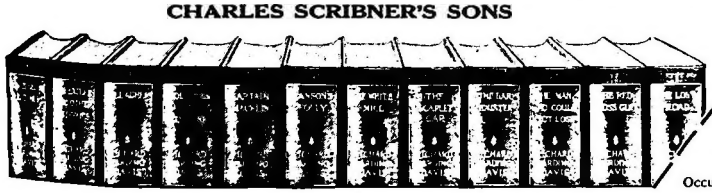

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